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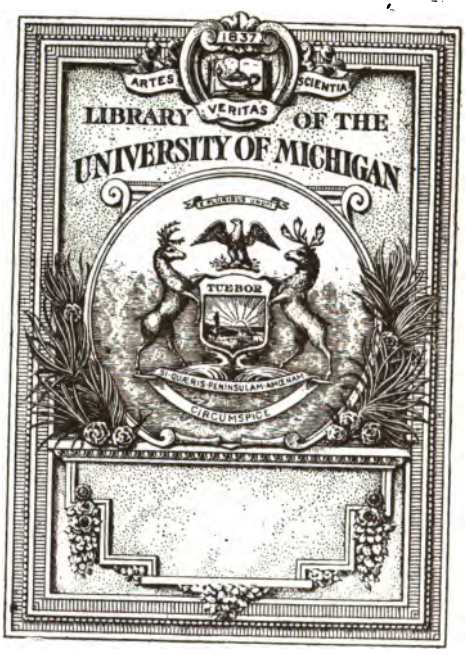
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A Play in Four Acts

By

ARTHUR WING PINERO

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M.3.61-8-113

Mid-Channel

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THEODORE BLUNDELL.
THE HONBLE. PETER MOTTRAM.
LEONARD FERRIS.
WARREN, *servant at Lancaster Gate.*
COLE, *servant at the flat in Cavendish Square.*
RIDEOUT, *Mr. Ferris's servant.*
UPHOLSTERERS.

ZOE BLUNDELL.
MRS. PIERPOINT.
ETHEL PIERPOINT.
MRS. ANNERLY.
LENA.

The scene is laid in London. The events of the First Act take place on an afternoon in January. The rest of the action occurs on a day in the following June.

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Mid-Channel

THE FIRST ACT

The scene is a drawing-room, decorated and furnished in the French style. In the wall opposite the spectator there is a door, the upper part of which is glazed. A silk curtain hangs across the glazed panels, but above the curtain there is a view of the corridor beyond. The fireplace, where a bright fire is burning, is in the wall on the right. There is a door on the further side of the fireplace, another on the nearer side. Both these doors are supposed to lead to a second drawing-room.

On either side of the fireplace there is an armchair, and on the further side, standing out in the room, is a settee. Some illustrated papers of the popular sort are lying upon the armchair next to the settee. Behind the settee are an oblong table and a chair. In the middle of the room, on the left of the settee and facing the fire, is another armchair; and on the left of the armchair on the nearer side of the fireplace there is a fauteuil-stool. A writing-table, with a chair before it, stands on the left hand side of the room, and among the objects on the writing-table are a hand-mirror and some photographs in frames. Other pieces of furniture, of a more formal kind than those already specified, fill spaces against the walls. One of these, on the left of the glazed door, is a second settee.

The room is lighted only by the blaze of the fire, and the corridor also is in semi-darkness.

[*Note: Throughout, "right" and "left" are the spectators' right and left, not the actor's.*]

[*The corridor is suddenly lighted up. Then* WARREN *enters at the glazed door and switches on the light in the room. He is followed by* MRS. PIERPOINT, *a pleasant-looking, middle-aged lady, and by* ETHEL, *a pretty girl of five-and-twenty.*]

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To the servant.*] You are sure Mrs. Blundell will be in soon?

WARREN.

She said half-past four, ma'am.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's that now, isn't it?

WARREN.

Just upon, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws, closing the door.*

ETHEL.

What beautiful rooms these are!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Money!

ETHEL.

I always feel I'm in Paris when I'm here, in some smart house in the Champs-Elysées—not at Lancaster Gate. What *is* Mr. Blundell, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

A stockbroker.

ETHEL.

Stockbroker?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Blundell—something-or-other—and Mottram. He goes to the City every morning.

ETHEL.

I know that. But I've never heard him, or Zoe, mention the Stock Exchange.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Sitting on the settee by the fireplace.*] Prosperous stockbrokers and their wives—those who move in a decent set—*don't* mention the Stock Exchange.

ETHEL.

Then that nice person, Mr. Mottram, is a stockbroker too?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Of course, dear. He's the "Mottram" of the firm.

ETHEL.

And *he's* the son of a peer.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Peers' sons are common enough in the City nowadays—and peers, for that matter.

ETHEL.

[*Moving to the fireplace and warming her hands.*] Zoe is a doctor's daughter.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Has she given you leave to call her Zoe?

ETHEL.

Yes, last week—asked me to. I'm so glad; I've taken such a liking to her.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She was a Miss Tucker. Her father practiced in New Cavendish Street. He was a great gout man.

ETHEL.

You *are* full of information, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Emma Lawton was giving me the whole history of the Blundells at lunch to-day. She has money, of her own.

ETHEL.

Zoe?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Dr. Tucker left sixty or seventy thousand pounds, and she came in for it all. But they'd got on before then.

ETHEL.

H'm! There are stockbrokers and stockbrokers, I suppose.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Straight and crooked, as in every other business or profession.

ETHEL.

I do think, though, that a girl in Zoe's position might have chosen somebody slightly more refined than Mr. Blundell.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

What's wrong with him? He's extremely amiable and inoffensive.

ETHEL.

Amiable!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

He strikes me as being so.

ETHEL.

I don't call it particularly amiable or inoffensive in a husband to be as snappy with his wife as he is with Zoe.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Snappy?

ETHEL.

Irritable—impatient.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I dare say there's an excellent understanding between them. They've been married a good many years.

ETHEL.

Thirteen, she's told me.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Married people are allowed to be out of humor with each other occasionally.

ETHEL.

A considerable allowance must be made for Mr. Blundell, I'm afraid.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You're prejudiced, Ethel. I've seen her just as snappy, as you term it, with him.

ETHEL.

You can't blame her, if she's provoked.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Nor him, if he's provoked. The argument cuts both ways——

ETHEL.

[*Listening.*] Sssh!

[ZOE, *a charming, animated, bright-eyed woman, wearing her hat and some costly furs, enters quickly at the glazed door.*

ZOE.

Delightful!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Rising.*] Your servant insisted on our coming up.

ZOE.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT.] If he hadn't, I'd have wrung his neck. [*Kissing* ETHEL.] How are you, dear? [*Stripping off her gloves.*] The weather! Isn't it filthy! Do you remember what the sun's like? I had the blinds drawn all over the house at eleven o'clock this morning. What's the good of trying to make believe it's day? [*Taking off her coat.*] Do sit down. Ugh! Why is it that more people commit suicide in summer than in winter?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Resuming her seat on the settee by the fire.*] Do they?

ETHEL.

[*Sitting upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Why, yes, mother; what-do-you-call-them?—statistics—prove it.

ZOE.

[*Throwing her coat and gloves upon the settee at the back and unpinning her hat.*] You'll see, when I put an end to myself, it will be in the winter time.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My dear!

ETHEL.

Zoe!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

If you are in this frame of mind, why don't you pack your trunks and fly?

ZOE.

Fly?

ETHEL.

Mother means cut it.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

ZOE.

[*Tossing her hat on to the settee and taking up the hand-mirror from the writing-table and adjusting her hair.*] Don't scold her; she picks up her slang from me.

ETHEL.

Evil communications——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I mean, go abroad for a couple of months—Egypt——

ETHEL.

Mother, how horrid of you! I should miss her terribly.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Cairo—Assouan ——

ZOE.

[*Looking into the hand-glass steadily.*] That's funny. I have been thinking lately of "cutting it."

MRS. PIERPOINT.

But I suppose it would have to be without your busy husband.

ZOE.

[*Replacing the mirror.*] Yes, it would be without Theo. [*Turning to* MRS. PIERPOINT *and* ETHEL *and rattling on again.*] Well! How have you been amusing yourselves? You wretches, you haven't been near me since Monday, either of you. Done anything—seen anything?

ETHEL.

Nothing.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ZOE.] If *you're* under the weather, there's some excuse for me.

ZOE.

[*Walking about restlessly.*] Oh, but I will keep moving, though the heavens fall. I've been to the theatre every night this week, and supped out afterward. They've opened such a ripping restaurant in Jermyn Street. [*Pausing.*] You haven't seen the new play at the St. Martin's, then?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

No.

ETHEL.

I want to, badly.

ZOE.

I'll take you. We'll make up a party. [*Scribbling a memorandum at the writing-table.*] I'll tell Lenny Ferris to get seats.

ETHEL.

Good business!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

ZOE.

It's all about children—kiddies. There are the sweetest little tots in it. Two especially—a tiny, round-eyed boy and a mite of a girl with straw-colored hair—you feel you must clamber on to the stage and hug them. You feel you *must!*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Aren't there any grown-ups?

ZOE.

[*Dropping into the armchair facing the fire.*] Oh, yes; they bore me.

ETHEL.

I was reading the story to you, mother ——

ZOE.

The story's no account—it's the kiddies. The man who wrote the thing must be awfully fond of children. I wonder whether he has any little 'uns. If he hasn't, it's of no consequence to him; he can imagine them. What a jolly gift! Fancy! To have the power of imagining children—bringing them to life! Just by shutting the door, and sitting down at your writing-table, and saying to your brain, "Now, then! I'm ready for them ——!" [*Breaking off.*] Ring the bell, Ethel. [ETHEL *rises, and, going to the fireplace, rings the bell.*] Let's have tea.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I'm afraid we can't stay for tea. I've promised to be at old Miss Fremantle's at five o'clock. Ethel ——

ETHEL.

Yes, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Go down-stairs for a few minutes. I want a little private conversation with Mrs. Blundell.

ETHEL.

[*Surprised.*] Private conversation!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

If she won't think me too troublesome.

ZOE.

[*Rising and opening the nearer door on the right—to* ETHEL.] Come in here. There's a lovely fire. [*Disappearing.*] I'll switch the light on.

ETHEL.

[*Following* ZOE—*at the door.*] What is it about, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Rising.*] Now, don't be inquisitive, Ethel.

ZOE.

[*From the adjoining room.*] Come along!

[ETHEL *goes into the next room.* WARREN *enters at the glazed door.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* WARREN.] Mrs. Blundell rang for tea.

WARREN.

Very good, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws as* ZOE *returns.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

We sha'n't be heard?

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] No.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's really most improper of me to bother you in this way.

ZOE.

[*Advancing to* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Can I be of any use to you?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Well, yes, you can. You can give me—what shall I call it?—a hint——

ZOE.

[*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool.*] A hint?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

On a subject that concerns Ethel. [*Sitting in the chair facing the fire.*] We're quite new friends of yours, dear Mrs. Blundell—is it six weeks since we dined at the Darrells'?——

ZOE.

There or thereabouts.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

A fortnight or so before Christmas, wasn't it? But my girl has formed a great attachment to you, and I fancy you are inclined to be interested in her.

ZOE.

Rather! She and I are going to be tremendous pals.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

That's splendid. Now, don't laugh at me for my extreme cautiousness, if you can help it.

ZOE.

Cautiousness?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Tell me—as one woman to another—do you consider it advisable for Ethel to see much of Mr. Ferris?

ZOE.

Advisable?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I've no doubt he's a highly respectable young man, as young men go—I'm not implying anything to the contrary ——

ZOE.

Is she seeing much of Mr. Ferris?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She meets him here.

ZOE.

Ah, yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And he has suddenly taken to dropping in to tea with us pretty regularly; and twice this week—twice—he has sent her some magnificent flowers—magnificent.

ZOE.

Dear old Lenny!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

There's something in his manner, too—one can't describe it ——

ZOE.

[*A little ruefully.*] Ha! Ha, ha, ha!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I *am* amusing you.

ZOE.

No, no. I beg your pardon. [*Rising and going to the fire.*] Somehow I've never pictured Lenny with a wife.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It may be only an excess of politeness on his part; there mayn't be the least foundation for my suspicions.

ZOE.

I suppose every married woman believes that her bachelor chums will remain bachelors.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And pray, dear Mrs. Blundell, don't take me for a match-making mother. I've no desire to lose my girl yet awhile, I assure you. But I want to know, naturally—it's my duty to know—exactly who and what are the men who come into my drawing-room.

ZOE.

Why, naturally.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

And it occurred to me that, as we made Mr. Ferris's acquaintance in your house, you wouldn't object to giving me, as I put it, the merest hint ——

ZOE.

Ethel—what about her? Does she like him?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's evident she doesn't dislike him. But she's not a girl who would be in a hurry to confide in anybody over a love affair, not even in her mother. True, there may be nothing to confide, in the present case. I repeat, I may be altogether mistaken. At the same time——

ZOE.

You wish me to advise you as to whether Lenny Ferris should be encouraged.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Whether he should be cold-shouldered—I prefer that expression.

ZOE.

Very well; I'll furnish you with his character, dear Mrs. Pierpoint, with pleasure.

[LEONARD FERRIS, *a fresh, boyish young man, enters at the glazed door, with the air of one who is at home.*

LEONARD.

Hallo!

ZOE.

[*Just as carelessly.*] Hallo, Len!

LEONARD.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT.] How d'ye do? How's Miss Ethel?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Inclining her head.*] Thank you——

LEONARD.

[*Rubbing his hands together.*] Here's a day!

ZOE.

[*Taking his hand.*] Your hands are frozen.

LEONARD.

[*Going to the fire.*] I drove my car up here.

ZOE.

You're crazy. [*Sitting on the settee by the fire.*] You never rang me up this morning, to ask if I was tired.

LEONARD.

Wire was engaged. First-rate night, last night.

ZOE.

[*Languidly.*] The summit. Lenny——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

Mrs. Pierpoint and I are talking secrets. Go into the next room for a second.

LEONARD.

[*Genially.*] Sha'n't, if there isn't a fire.

ZOE.

Of course there's a fire. Things ain't so bad in the City as all that.

LEONARD.

[*At the nearer door on the right.*] Any tea?

ZOE.

By and by. You'll find somebody in there you know.

LEONARD.

[*Going into the room.*] Who?

ZOE.

[*Calling out.*] Shut the door. [*The door is closed.*] Talk of the ——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Bless me, I hope not!

ZOE.

No, I shouldn't turn him in there at this moment it he wasn't what he is—the dearest boy in the world—should I?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Boy ——?

ZOE.

He's thirty-two. A man of two-and-thirty *is* a boy to a woman of—to an old married woman. He's the simplest, wholesomest, best-natured fellow living. If you had him for a son-in-law, you'd be lucky.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's a relief to me, at any rate ——

ZOE.

And I should lose one of my tame robins.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Tame robins?

ZOE.

[*Rising and going over to the writing-table and taking up two of the photographs.*] I always have his photo on my table—his and Peter Mottram's. Peter Mottram is my

husband's partner—you've met him here. I call them my tame robins. They come and eat crumbs off my window-sill. I've no end of tame robins—men chums—but these two are my specials. [*Replacing the photographs.*] Well! If Lenny ever goes, I shall have to promote Harry Estridge or Jim Mallandain or Cossy Rawlings.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Who has risen and followed* ZOE *to the writing-table.*] But why should Mr. Ferris ever "go" completely?

ZOE.

[*Smiling.*] Oh, when a robin marries, Jenny doesn't share him with another wren. Not much!

[WARREN *enters at the glazed door with a female servant. They carry in the tea and lay it upon the table behind the settee by the fire.*

ZOE.

[*After glancing at the servants—dropping her voice.*] I'd better finish drawing up the prospectus, while I'm at it.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Prospectus?

ZOE.

He's got two thousand a year. Both his people are dead. There's an aunt in the country who may leave him a bit extra; but she's a cantankerous old cat and, in my opinion, charity'll have every *sou*. Still, two thousand a year ——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I oughtn't to hear any more. But you understand, don't you ——?

ZOE.

Perfectly. And he lives in a comfy little flat behind the Albert Hall and is mad on motor-cars. He's invented a wonderful wheel which is to give the knock to pneumatics. If anything will bring him to ruin, that will. [*Walking away toward the tea-table laughingly.*] There!

WARREN.

Tea is served, ma'am.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ZOE, *who returns to her.*] I'm exceedingly obliged to you. You won't breathe a word to Ethel?

ZOE.

Not a syllable. It would break my heart, but I hope it'll come off, for her sake.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

She's a sweet, sensible child.

ZOE.

And as for him, I'll tell you this for your comfort—I'm honestly certain that Lenny Ferris would be the sort of husband that lasts.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

That lasts? What do you mean?

ZOE.

Oh—never mind. [*Gaily.*] Tea! [*The servants have withdrawn. She runs across to the further door on the right, opens it, and calls.*] Tea! [*Seating herself at the tea-table.*] Are you firm about going on?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

It's Lizzie Fremantle's birthday. She's Ethel's godmother. [*To* ETHEL, *who enters with* LEONARD.] Are you ready, Ethel?

ETHEL.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Must we?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Now, my dear——!

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD.] Lenny, you've got to get tickets for the St. Martin's and take the whole crowd of us.

LEONARD.

[*With a wry face.*] That kids' play again!

ZOE.

Very well; Peter will do it.

LEONARD.

No, no; right you are.

ZOE.

I stand.

LEONARD.

Rot!

ZOE.

Then Peter has the job. [*To the ladies.*] We'll ask Peter Mottram to be one of us anyhow.

LEONARD.

The supper's mine, then.

ZOE.

Anything for peace. [*Shaking hands with* MRS. PIERPOINT, *who comes to her.*] Monday night?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You're a great deal too good.

[LEONARD *has opened the glazed door and is now in the corridor.* MRS. PIERPOINT *joins him.*

LEONARD.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT, *as they disappear.*] Got a vehicle?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My venerable four-wheeler—the oldest friend I have in London ——

ETHEL.

[*To* ZOE, *who rises.*] What did mother have to say to you so mysteriously?

ZOE.

Er—she wants me to consult Theo about something.

ETHEL.

Her railway shares?

ZOE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

ETHEL.

[*Satisfied.*] Oh? Good-bye.

ZOE.

When are we to have a nice long jaw together—just you and I?

ETHEL.

Mother won't let me out alone in these fogs.

ZOE.

Fog or no fog, try and shunt her to-morrow.

ETHEL.

I'll do my best.

ZOE.

I'll be in all the morning. [*They turn their heads toward the door, listening.*] Lenny's whistling for you.

ETHEL.

Mother——!

[*They kiss affectionately and* ETHEL *hurries away.* ZOE *resumes her seat at the tea-table and pours out tea. Presently* LEONARD *returns and, after closing the door, comes to her.*

LEONARD.

[*Cheerfully.*] It's beginning to sleet now. 'Pon my soul——! [*She hands him a cup of tea in silence. He looks at her inquiringly.*] Anything wrong, Zoe?

ZOE.

[*With an air of indifference.*] No.

LEONARD.

Positive?

ZOE.

[*In the same tone, offering him a plate of bread and butter.*] Quite.

LEONARD.

[*Taking a slice.*] Thought there'd been another row, perhaps.

ZOE.

[*Putting the plate of bread and butter aside and taking up her cup and saucer.*] Hell of a row last night.

LEONARD.

Last night?

ZOE.

This morning, rather.

LEONARD.

When you came home?

ZOE.

[*Sipping her tea.*] After you and Peter brought me home.

LEONARD.

What over?

ZOE.

Nothing.

LEONARD.

[*Drinking.*] Must have been over something.

ZOE.

Oh, some trifle—as usual.

LEONARD.

Too bad of Theo—damned sight too bad.

ZOE.

I dare say it was as much my fault as his.

LEONARD.

[*Hotly.*] It's a cursed shame!

ZOE.

Drop it, Len. [*Handing him a dish of cakes.*] Cake?

LEONARD.

[*Putting his empty cup down before her and taking a cake.*] Tea.

ZOE.

[*Pouring out another cup of tea for him.*] First time you've drunk tea with me this week. Honored!

LEONARD.

Sorry.

ZOE.

M'yes—[*giving him his tea*] sorry that Mrs. Pierpoint and Ethel can't receive you this afternoon.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause, uncomfortably.*] Mrs. Pierpoint been telling you anything about me?

ZOE.

Mentioned that you frequently turn up in Sloane Street at tea time.

LEONARD.

There's a man down that way who's frightfully gone on my wheel.

ZOE.

[*Drinking.*] Indeed?

LEONARD.

My great difficulty, you know, is to get it on to the market.

ZOE.

India-rubber people opposing you, I expect.

LEONARD.

Tooth and nail.

ZOE.

[*Nibbling a cake.*] And the man who lives Sloane Street way ——?

LEONARD.

Very influential chap.

ZOE.

Capitalist?

LEONARD.

Millionaire.

ZOE.

H'm! And when you're down Sloane Street way, do you take your flowers to Miss Pierpoint, or does your florist send them?

[*Again there is silence. He lays his cup down, leaves her side, and produces his cigarette-case. Sticking a cigarette between his lips, he is about to close the case when she rises and takes a cigarette from it. She moves to the fireplace, lighting her cigarette with a match from a box attached to a gold chatelaine hanging from her waist. He seats himself in the chair facing the fire and lights his own cigarette.*

LEONARD.

[*Moodily.*] I don't want to marry, Zoe.

ZOE.

There's no reason why you shouldn't, if you feel disposed to; but you needn't be a sneak about it.

LEONARD.

The aunt's pitching into me again like billy-oh. High time I settled down—high time I became a reputable member of society! I ask you, what the deuce have I ever done that's particularly disreputable? Then come two verses of Scripture ——

ZOE.

[*Advancing to him.*] She hasn't ordered you to be underhanded with your best friends, I assume?

LEONARD.

I'm not underhanded.

ZOE.

Why this concealment, then?

LEONARD.

There's no concealment; there's nothing to conceal; I give you my word there isn't. I—I haven't made up my mind one way or the other.

ZOE.

[*Witheringly.*] You're weighing the question!

LEONARD.

Very well; I'm weighing it, if you like. [*Flinging the end of his match into the fireplace and jumping up.*] Confound it all! Mayn't a man send a basket or two of rotten flowers to a girl without having his special license bought for him by meddling people?

ZOE.

Thank you.

LEONARD.

I don't mean you, Zoe. You know I don't mean you. [*Pacing the room.*] Ethel—Miss Pierpoint—is a charming girl, but I'm no more in love with her than I am with my old hat.

ZOE.

Then you oughtn't to pay her marked attention.

LEONARD.

I'm not paying her marked attention. [ZOE *shrugs her shoulders.*] If Mrs. Pierpoint says I've been making love to her daughter——

ZOE.

She has said nothing of the kind.

LEONARD.

[*Sitting in the chair before the writing-table, in a huff.*] That's all right. Pity she can't hold her tongue over trifles.

[*There is another pause. Then, partly kneeling upon the chair in the middle of the room, and resting her elbow on the back of it,* ZOE *softens.*

ZOE.

[*Making rings with her cigarette smoke.*] Don't be wild, Len. I was only vexed with you for not consulting me. It would hurt my feelings dreadfully if you got engaged to anybody on the sly. Len—— [*He turns to her, but with his head down.*] She *is* a charming girl. I'm not surprised at your being spoons on her. If I were a man, she's just the sort of girl *I'd* marry, if I were on the lookout for a wife.

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] Perhaps I *have* made myself a bit of an ass over her, Zoe. [*She laughs lightly. He raises his eyes.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

Well?

LEONARD.

[*Gazing at* ZOE.] Do you know that she reminds me very often of you?

ZOE.

She! I'm old enough to be her grandmother.

LEONARD.

Oh, hang that! She's got hold of a lot of your odd little tricks—a lot of 'em.

ZOE.

She's been with me a goodish deal lately.

LEONARD.

That's it; and she has the most enormous admiration for you—enormous.

ZOE.

She's a dear.

LEONARD.

[*Gently hitting his knee with his fist.*] I've thought of all that when I've been worrying it out in my mind.

ZOE.

Thought of all what?

LEONARD.

That you'd always be pals, you two—close pals.

ZOE.

If she became Mrs. Lenny ?

LEONARD.

[*Nodding.*] And so, if I did screw myself up to—to speaking to her, it wouldn't make the least difference to our friendship—yours and mine.

ZOE.

No difference !

LEONARD.

I should still be your tame robin.

ZOE.

Ah, no ; don't make that mistake, Len.

LEONARD.

Mistake ?

ZOE.

[*Shaking her head.*] It never works. I've seen similar cases over and over again. There's any amount of gush at the start, between the young wife and the husband's women-pals ; but the end is always the same.

LEONARD.

The end?

ZOE.

Gradually the wife draws the husband away. She manages it somehow. We have a gift for it. I did it myself when I married Theo.

LEONARD.

[*Rising and walking about.*] If I believed what you say, Zoe, I'd never size up a girl with a view to marrying as long as I live.

ZOE.

[*Teasingly.*] You're a vain creature. I've plenty of other boys, Len, to fill your place.

LEONARD.

[*Not heeding her.*] If things were smoother with you and Theo, one mightn't hesitate half as much.

ZOE.

There's Peter Mottram, Gus Hedmont, Harry Estridge, Claud Lowenstein ——

LEONARD.

As it is—Great Scot!—I'm a brute even to think of taking the risk.

ZOE.

Cossy Rawlings, Jim Mallandain, Robby Relf ——

LEONARD.

[*Stopping in his walk.*] Yes, but my friendship's more to you than the friendship of most of those other fellows, I should hope.

ZOE.

[*Making a grimace at him.*] Not a scrap.

LEONARD.

[*His brow darkening.*] You told me once I was your favorite.

ZOE.

My chaff; I've no favorite.

LEONARD.

[*Laying the remains of his cigarette upon a little bronze tray on the writing-table.*] Peter's a trump, and Harry

Estridge and Rawlings are sound enough; but I often feel I'd like to knock young Lowenstein's teeth down his fat throat.

ZOE.

[*Blowing her smoke in his direction as he comes to her and stands before her.*] You get married and mind your own concerns.

LEONARD.

Zoe, I hate to see men of that class buzzing round you.

ZOE.

[*Mockingly.*] Do you!

LEONARD.

Look here! Whatever happens between you and Theo in the future, you'll never let anything or anybody drive you off the rails, will you?

ZOE.

[*Frowning.*] Len!

LEONARD.

I couldn't stand it; [*putting his hands upon her shoulders*] I tell you straight, it 'ud break me. [*Passionately, his grip tightening.*] Zoe ——!

[*She shakes herself free and backs away from him, confronting him with a flushed face.*

ZOE.

[*Quietly.*] Don't be silly. [*Brushing her hair from her forehead.*] If ever you do that again, Len, I'll box your ears.

[*The* HONBLE. PETER MOTTRAM, *a spruce, well-preserved man of fifty, enters at the glazed door.*

PETER.

[*Cheerily.*] Good-mornin'—or whatever it is.

ZOE.

[*Dropping the end of her cigarette into the grate.*] That you, Peter?

LEONARD.

[*Surlily.*] I'm just off.

PETER.

Don't apologize.

LEONARD.

[*At the glazed door, to* PETER.] See you later.

[*He goes out.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] What's the matter with the youth?

ZOE.

[*With a shrug.*] Got the hump over something. [*Facing him.*] Tea?

PETER.

No, thanks. [*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room.*] And how are you to-day, my dear lady? [*She makes a wry mouth, sighs, and throws herself disconsolately upon the settee by the fire. He nods intelligently.*] Yes, sorry to hear you and old Theo have had another bad fall-out.

ZOE.

[*Arranging a pillow for her head.*] I guessed he'd carry it all to you.

PETER.

Shockin'ly grieved, I am.

ZOE.

He began this one.

PETER.

By blowin' you up for goin' on the frisk every night.

ZOE.

And I answered him back. I was dogweary. It was nearly one o'clock. He needn't have jumped upon me almost before I'd taken the key out of the lock.

PETER.

[*Demurely.*] I also have been reproved, for aidin' and abettin'.

ZOE.

Serves you jolly well right. Why didn't you and Lenny come in with me, you cowards? That might have saved a squabble. I begged you to have a whiskey.

PETER.

[*After a brief pause.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

[*In a muffled voice, her head in the pillow.*] Oh, be kind to me, Peter.

PETER.

Why *do* you sally forth night after night?

ZOE.

Because I must,

PETER.

Must?

ZOE.

I've got the fidgets.

PETER.

I get the fidgets at times, in bed. D'ye know how I cure 'em?

ZOE.

Of course I don't.

PETER.

I lie perfectly stiff and still; I *make* myself lie perfectly still. I *won't* stir. I say to myself, "Peter, you *sha'n't* twist or turn." And I win.

ZOE.

How easy it is to talk! I defy you to control yourself if you're shut up with a person who goads you to desperation.

PETER.

Theo?

ZOE.

[*Beating her pillow.*] How *can* I stay at home and eat a long dinner, and spend an entire evening, alone with Theo? We're not entertaining just now; he says he's fed up with having people here.

PETER.

Take him out with you.

ZOE.

Then we quarrel before others. That's too degrading. Oh, it's tiff, tiff, wrangle, jangle, outdoors *and* indoors with us!

PETER.

You say things to Theo when you're angry, Zoe, that wound him to the quick.

ZOE.

[*Satirically.*] Really!

PETER.

Really. You mayn't be aware of it; you scratch the poor old chap till he bleeds.

ZOE.

Do you imagine he never says things to me that wound me to the quick?

PETER.

He doesn't mean half of 'em.

ZOE.

Neither do I.

PETER.

[*Rising and going to the fire.*] No; there's the crass foolishness of it all. [*In a tone of expostulation.*] My dear lady ——

ZOE.

[*Suddenly sitting upright.*] We're on each other's nerves, Peter. That's the plain truth, we're on each other's nerves.

PETER.

Worryin' each other.

ZOE.

Sick to death of each other! We shall have been married fourteen years on the thirtieth of next June. Isn't it appalling! He's getting so stodgy and pompous and flat-footed. He drives me mad with his elderly ways.

PETER.

[*Soothingly.*] Oh ——!

ZOE.

He's sick and tired of *me,* at any rate. My little jokes and pranks, that used to amuse him so—they annoy him now, scandalize him. He's continually finding fault with me—bullying me. That's all the notice he takes of me. As for my gowns or my hats—anything I put on—I might dress in sackcloth; he'd never observe it. [*Tearfully.*] Ah——! [*She searches for her handkerchief and fails to find it.* PETER *produces a folded handkerchief from his breast-pocket, shakes it out, and gives it to her. She wipes her eyes as she proceeds.*] Sometimes, I own, I'm aggravating; but he forgets how useful I was to him in the old days, when we were climbing. Yes, *those* were the days —the first six or seven years of our marriage, when we were up north, in Fitzjohn's Avenue! [*Tossing* PETER'S *handkerchief to him and getting to her feet.*] Oh! Oh, we were happy then, Peter! You didn't know us then, when we were up north!

PETER.

[*Wagging his head.*] My dear lady, we were all happier when we were up north.

ZOE.

[*Giving him a look of surprise as she paces the room on the left.*] You!

PETER.

I mean, in a previous stage of our careers.

ZOE.

Ah, yes, yes.

PETER.

That's the lesson of life, Mrs. Zoe. We've all had our Fitzjohn's Avenue, in a sense. In other words, we've all been young and keen as mustard ; with everythin' before us, instead of havin' most things behind us.

ZOE.

[*Leaning on the back of the chair before the writing-table.*] Oh, don't!

PETER.

[*Thoughtfully.*] D'ye know, I often wonder whether there's anythin' more depressin' than to see the row of trophies standin' on the sideboard?

ZOE.

[*Sitting at the writing-table and digging her fingers into her hair.*] Be quiet, Peter!

PETER.

That silver-gilt vase there! The old horse that gained it for you is lyin' in the paddock with a stone a'top of him, and you're usin' his hoof as an ink-pot. Those goblets you won on the river, and the cup you helped yourself to on the links at Biarritz or St. Moritz—there's a little pile of ashes at the bottom of every one of 'em! So it is with life generally. You scoop in the prizes—and there are the pots on the sideboard to remind you that it ain't the *prizes* that count, but the pushin' and the struglin' and the cheerin'. Ah, they preach to us on Sundays about cherubim and seraphim! It's my firm hope and conviction that when we die and go to heaven we shall all find ourselves up north again—in Fitzjohn's Avenue! [*Coming to the chair in the middle of the room.*] Meanwhile, it's no good repinin'. [*Turning the chair*

toward her and sitting.] The trophies *are* on the side-board, dear lady, and they've got to be kep' clean and shiny. [*Gravely.*] Now, Zoe —— [*She whimpers.*] Zoe, Zoe —— [*She turns to him.*] Zoe, one ugly word passed between you and Theo last night ——

ZOE.

One ——?

PETER.

One ugly word that must never be repeated.

ZOE.

What word?

[*The glazed door opens and* WARREN *appears carrying a teapot on a tray. He comes to the table and exchanges the teapot he is carrying for the one that is already there.*

ZOE.

[*To the man.*] Mr. Mottram won't have any tea, Warren.

WARREN.

[*Removing the cups and saucers which have been used and putting them on to his tray.*] No, ma'am; but Mr. Blundell's just come in, ma'am.

[WARREN *withdraws, closing the door.* ZOE *rises stiffly, and gathers up her hat, coat, and gloves. Then she returns to* PETER, *who remains seated.*

ZOE.

What word was it?

PETER.

Separation.

THEODORE BLUNDELL, *a big, burly, but good-looking man, enters at the glazed door. He halts on entering and glances furtively at* ZOE, *as if expecting her to speak; but, without meeting his eyes, she passes him and leaves the room.*

THEODORE.

[*With a shrug.*] Ha! [PETER, *looking over his shoulder, sees that he and* THEODORE *are alone.* THEODORE *seats himself at the tea-table and pours out his tea grimly.*] Lots o' good you seem to have done, Peter.

PETER.

Haven't done much, I admit. Pity you came home quite so soon.

THEODORE.

You left the office at half-past two.

PETER.

She wasn't in when I first got here.

THEODORE.

[*Taking a slice of bread and butter.*] Anyhow, kind of you to offer to have a talk to her. [*Munching.*] Plenty of abuse of me, h'm?

PETER.

She says you're on each other's nerves, Theo.

THEODORE.

I'm afraid there's something in that.

PETER.

And that you are growin' a bit heavy in hand, old man.

THEODORE.

[*Drily.*] Exceedingly sorry.

PETER.

[*After a pause.*] Theo ——

THEODORE.

Hallo?

PETER.

Shall I tell you what's at the bottom of it all?

THEODORE.

Well?

PETER.

She's got a feelin' that you're tired of her.

THEODORE.

[*Gulping his tea.*] If you knew how constantly I have that served up to me ——!

PETER.

Will you allow me to speak out?

THEODORE.

Don't be so polite.

PETER.

My belief is that, if you could avoid conveyin' that impression to Zoe, matters would improve considerably in this establishment.

THEODORE.

Oh?

PETER.

It's as easy as brushin' your hat. A little pettin'—a little sweetheartin'——

THEODORE.

Yes?

PETER.

[*Discouraged.*] Well, those are my views, for what they're worth.

THEODORE.

[*Pouring out another cup of tea.*] My dear fellow, if you'd get married, and have thirteen or fourteen years of it, as I've had, your views would be worth more than they are.

PETER.

Oh, that won't wash. [*Rising.*] When a man's sufferin' from gout in the toe, he doesn't stipulate that his M.D. shall be writhin' from the same ailment. No, very frequently, the outsider ——

THEODORE.

Good gracious, you're not going to remark that lookers-on see most of the game!

PETER.

Words to that effect.

THEODORE.

Ho! Why is it that, the moment a man's matrimonial affairs are in a tangle, every platitude in the language is chewed-out at him? [*Leaning his head on his hands.*] If you've nothing fresher to say on the subject ——!

PETER.

[*Oracularly.*] My dear chap, it's tryin' to say somethin' fresh on the subject of marriage that's responsible for a large share of the domestic unhappiness and discontent existin' at the present day. There's too much of this tryin' to say somethin' fresh on *every* subject, in my opinion.

THEODORE.

Nobody can accuse *you*, Peter——

PETER.

You take it from me, there are two institootions in this world that are never goin' to alter—men and women and the shape of chickens' eggs. Chickens' eggs are never goin' to be laid square; and men and women will continue to be mere men and women till the last contango.[1] [THEODORE *finishes his tea, rises, and comes to the fire.*] I'm referrin', of course, to real men and women. I don't inclood persons in petticoats with flat chests and no hips; nor individuals wearin' beards and trousers who dine on a basin of farinaceous food and a drink o' water out o' the filter. They belong to a distinct species. No; I mean the genuine article, like you and me and your missus—men and women with blood in their veins, and one-and-a-half per cent. of good, humanizin' alcohol in *that.*

THEODORE.

[*Throwing a log on the fire.*] What's the moral of your eloquent, but rather vague, discourse?

[1] "Contango-day"—a Stock Exchange expression: the day on which a buyer or seller "carries over" to the next settling-day.

PETER.

[*At the chair in the middle of the room.*] The moral? Oh, the moral is that men and women of the ordinary, regulation pattern must put up with the defects of each other's qualities. [*Turning the chair so that it faces* THEODORE *and again sitting in it.*] She complains that you don't admire her frocks and frills, Theo.

THEODORE.

[*Groaning.*] Oh!

PETER.

Now, come! Where's the trouble? There's my old mother—seventy-five in April! Whenever I'm at Stillwood, I make a reg'lar practice of complimentin' her on her rig-out. "By Jove, mater," I say, "you *are* a buck this mornin'!" Or evenin', as the case may be. I couldn't tell you what she's wearin', to save my life; but there's no harm done.

THEODORE.

Yes, *you* do it; but your father doesn't do it, I'll be bound. [PETER *looks glum and is silent.*] It's too trivial! [*Producing his cigar case.*] A husband can't be everlastingly praising his wife's clothes. [*Offering a cigar to* PETER *which he declines.*] The absence of comment on my part is a sign that I'm satisfied with Zoe's appearance, surely.

PETER.

She's one of the smartest women in London.

THEODORE.

[*Irritably.*] I know she is. I've told her so till I'm sick. [*Cutting and lighting a cigar.*] I've always been intensely proud of Zoe, as a matter of fact—intensely proud of her.

PETER.

No more than her due.

THEODORE.

[*With increasing indignation.*] Good God, how often, at a dinner-party, have I caught myself looking along the table and thinking she's the handsomest woman in the room! Tsch! It's a ridiculous thing to say ——

PETER.

What?

THEODORE.

I suppose no man has ever been "in love" with his wife for longer than I've been with mine.

PETER.

[*Significantly.*] *Been.*

THEODORE.

And I have a very great affection for her still—or should have, if her behavior didn't check it.

PETER.

If you showed your affection more plainly, wouldn't that check her behavior?

THEODORE.

[*Leaving the fireplace and moving about the room.*] Oh, my dear fellow, haven't you brains enough to see! We're middle-aged people, Zoe and I. I *am* middle-aged, and she's not far off it, poor girl. There must come a time on a journey when your pair of horses stop prancing and settle down to a trot.

PETER.

How's that for a platitude!

THEODORE.

I thought that worm-eaten illustration might appeal to you.

PETER.

She keeps wonderfully young, Theo.

THEODORE.

Isn't that a little to my credit? But Zoe's within three years of forty. You can't put the clock back.

PETER.

A woman's as old as she looks——

THEODORE.

And a man's as old as he feels! Another ancient wheeze!

PETER.

And a *married* woman's as old as her husband *makes* her feel.

THEODORE.

My dear Peter, I don't want Zoe to feel older than her years by a single hour. But I confess I do ask her occasionally to feel as old *as* her years, and not to make herself damnably absurd.

PETER.

Absurd?

THEODORE.

This infernal fooling about with the boys, for instance —the cause of last night's flare-up—her "tame robins"— you're one——! [PETER *rises hastily and goes to the fire.*] Yes, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, for encouraging her.

PETER.

Who's in fault? Because a man's wife has ceased to be attractive to him, it doesn't follow that she ain't attractive to others.

THEODORE.

[*Contemptuously.*] Attractive? The vanity of "attracting" a parcel of empty-headed young men! You're the patriarch of the group! [*Throwing himself into the chair just vacated by* PETER.] The whole thing's undignified —raffish.

PETER.

[*Extending a forefinger.*] *You* contrive to be a trifle more sprightly at home, Theo ——

THEODORE.

[*Moving his head from side to side.*] Oh, you will hammer away at that! I'm forty-six. My sprightly days are over.

PETER.

[*Emphatically.*] Humbug, old chap.

THEODORE.

What's humbug?

PETER.

Men are the biggest humbugs goin'—especially to themselves. And a man of your age or mine—and I'm four years your senior—is never a bigger humbug than when he's deloodin' himself with the notion that he's scrap-iron.

THEODORE.

You're a gay old spark ——

PETER.

No, it's when the sun's working round to the west—it's when men are where we are now, that they're most liable to get into mischief.

THEODORE.

Mischief? What are you driving at?

PETER.

Nothin'. I'm simply layin' down a general principle.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Confound your general principles! Don't be an ass.

PETER.

[*Coming to* THEODORE.] That stoopid nonsense talked last night—early this mornin'—about livin' apart—who started it?

THEODORE.

Zoe. I fancy it was Zoe—last night.

PETER.

Oh, it wasn't the first time ——?

THEODORE.

[*Smoking with fierce puffs.*] We had an awful scene—disgraceful. I felt inclined to rush out of the house then and there.

PETER.

Why didn't you? You could have let yourself in again when she'd gone to by-by.

THEODORE.

[*Sullenly.*] No, that's not my style. If ever I do bang the front door, it'll be once and for all, my friend.

PETER.

[*Shaking him.*] Oh! Oh!

THEODORE.

She's independent; she has her own income—you know—and I've told her I'd supplement it, if necessary. I've settled this house on her as it is; she'd be welcome to it, and every stick in it, worst come to the worst.

PETER.

Theo!

THEODORE.

And I'd go and live in a garret, in peace.

PETER.

You're not considerin' such a step seriously?

THEODORE.

[*Turning upon him roughly.*] No, I'm not—not when I'm sitting here chatting quietly with you. Nor when she's rational and—and—and amenable, as she can be when she chooses. [*Clenching his hands.*] But when she's irritating me till I'm half beside myself, I—I ——

PETER.

You ——?

THEODORE.

[*Looking up at* PETER.] My God, Peter, you're a wise man, never to have taken it on!

PETER.

Marriage?

THEODORE.

[*Throwing his head back.*] Oh, my dear fellow!

[*The glazed door opens and* ZOE *enters meekly. Her eyes are red, and a handkerchief is crumpled up in her hand. She glances at the tea-table and comes to* THEODORE. PETER *retreats to the fireplace.*

ZOE.

[*To* THEODORE, *in a piteous voice.*] Have you—had your tea?

THEODORE.

[*Frigidly.*] I poured it out myself.

[*After a moment's hesitation, she bends over him and gives him a kiss. Then she turns away and, seating herself at the writing-table, proceeds to write a note. There is an awkward silence.*

THEODORE.

[*Breaking the silence, gruffly.*] Er—Zo——

ZOE.

[*With a sniff, writing.*] Yes?

THEODORE.

What are you doing to-night?

ZOE.

Jim Mallandain was going to take me to the Palace. I'm putting him off.

THEODORE.

I'll dine you out and take you somewhere.

ZOE.

No, I'd rather have a quiet evening at home, Theo—just you and me. [*Blowing her nose.*] I've ordered Mrs. Killick to send up an extra-nice dinner.

THEODORE.

Perhaps Peter ——

ZOE.

[*Stamping her foot.*] No, I won't have him.

PETER.

Besides, I'm booked.

ZOE.

[*Petulantly.*] I don't care whether you are or not. I want to dine alone with my husband.

[*There is another pause, during which* ZOE *scratches away with her pen.*

PETER.

[*Clearing his throat.*] Well, I'll be gettin' along. [THEODORE *rises.*] I say ——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

Why don't you and Zoe have a week or a fortnight in Paris? It 'ud do you both a heap of good.

THEODORE.

Impossible. How can I?

PETER.

Cert'nly you can. If anythin' important crops up, Tom Slade or I will run over to you; or you could come back.

[*Again there is a pause.* ZOE *stops writing.*] Do, old chap. [*Another pause.*] Won't you?

THEODORE.

[*Without enthusiasm.*] All right.

PETER.

A fortnight? Nothin'll happen.

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] A fortnight.

[*Uttering a little chirp of delight,* ZOE *resumes writing.* PETER *goes to her as* THEODORE *moves away to the fireplace.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] Good-bye, ma'am. [*She gives him her left hand over her shoulder. He squeezes it and makes for the glazed door. There he appears to be struck by an idea. After a silence, he turns slowly, contemplates the pair for a moment with a puckered brow, and advances a step or two.*] Theo ——

THEODORE.

[*Who has picked up one of the illustrated papers and has seated himself upon the settee.*] H'm?

PETER.

[*His hands in his pockets, rattling his keys.*] About half-way between Dover and Calais—no, it's between Folkestone and Boulogne, ain't it? ——

THEODORE.

[*Examining the pictures.*] What?

PETER.

Of course! About half-way between Folkestone and Boulogne—mid-Channel—there's a shoal.

THEODORE.

[*Turning a page of his paper.*] What of it?

PETER.

Le Colbart, the French sailormen call it—Le Colbart. *We* call it the Ridge. [*Coming forward.*] If you go by Folkestone and Boulogne, you'll pass over it.

THEODORE.

[*Glancing at him suspiciously.*] Thanks for the valuable information.

PETER.

D'ye know, I've never encountered that blessed shoal without experiencin' a most unpleasant time?

ZOE.

[*Addressing an envelope.*] Oh, my dear Peter!

PETER.

I've crossed on some of the finest days o' the year. The sun's been shinin', and outside the harbor the water's been as smooth as it's been *in*side. Everythin's looked as enticin' as could be; but as we've neared the Ridge—mid-Channel—I've begun to feel fidgety, restless, out o' sorts—hatin' myself and hatin' the man who's been sharin' my cabin with me. But the sensation hasn't lasted long.

ZOE.

[*Sealing her letter.*] Glad to hear it.

PETER.

No; gradually the beastly motion has died down, and in a quarter of an hour or so I've found myself pacin' the deck again, arm-in-arm with the travelin'-companion I've been positively loathin' a few minutes earlier.

THEODORE.

[*Gaping demonstratively.*] Very interesting.

PETER.

My dear pals, I remember the idea once occurrin' to me—I mentioned it to Charlie Westbrook at the time—there's a resemblance between *that* and marriage.

THEODORE.

[*Shortly.*] Ha! Thought that was coming.

[ZOE *turns in her chair, to listen to* PETER.

PETER.

Yes, and marriage, mark you, at its best and brightest. The happiest and luckiest of married couples have got to cross that wretched Ridge. However successful the first half of their journey may be, there's the rough-and-tumble of mid-Channel to negotiate. Some arrive there quicker than others, some later; it depends on wind and tide. But they *get* there; and a bad time it is, and must be—a time when travelin'-companions see nothin' but the spots on each other's yellow faces, and when innoomerable kind words and innoomerable kind acts are clean forgotten. [ZOE, *her letter in her hand, rises impulsively and comes to* PETER.] But, as I tell you, it's soon over—*well* over, if only Mr. Jack and Mrs. Jill will understand the situation; if only they'll say to themselves, "We're on the Ridge; we're in mid-Channel; in another quarter of an hour the boat'll be steady again—as steady as when we stepped on to the gangway." [*To* THEODORE.] Not offended, old man?

THEODORE.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Ha, ha, ha!

ZOE.

[*Gently, giving her letter to* PETER.] Tell Warren to give that to a messenger boy. [*To* THEODORE.] Theo——!

[*She puts her hands upon* PETER'S *shoulders and kisses him.*

PETER.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha! [*To* THEODORE.] Division of profits. [*At the glazed door.*] When'll you be off?

THEODORE.

Oh—one day next week.

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] To-morrow mornin', then.

[*He goes out, closing the door.*

ZOE.

Dear old Peter!

THEODORE.

[*Deep in his paper.*] Peter's getting a bit of a bore, though.

ZOE.

[*Mimicking* PETER, *as she wipes her eyes.*] He's amusin'. [*Going to* THEODORE *and seating herself beside him.*] Theo——

THEODORE.

H'm?

ZOE.

[*Edging up to him.*] Let's go by Folkestone and Boulogne—shall we?

THEODORE.

I don't mind.

ZOE.

[*Wistfully.*] Let's go by Folkestone and Boulogne—and have done with it. [*Slipping her arm through his.*] Theo—last night—sorry. [*He nods and looks at another picture.*] I take it all back—the things I said. I didn't mean them.

THEODORE.

That's all right.

ZOE.

And *you* didn't mean ——?

THEODORE.

[*Impatiently.*] Of course I didn't.

ZOE.

[*Giving herself a shake.*] Ah! [*After a brief pause:*] Theo ——

THEODORE.

H'm?

ZOE.

[*Taking the paper from him playfully.*] Don't look at those improper young ladies. [*Coaxingly.*] Couldn't you manage to get away on Sunday?

THEODORE.

Oh—I might.

ZOE.

It's your treat to me, isn't it—and the beginning of better times? The *sooner* we begin ——

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] You shall have it all your own way.

ZOE.

[*Gleefully.*] Sunday!

THEODORE

H'm.

ZOE.

I'm dreadfully shabby. I've no new clothes. You don't object?

THEODORE.

[*Distinctly.*] Now, my dear Zo—my darling—understand this from me clearly. You are *never* shabby; you *couldn't* be shabby. As far as I am a judge, you are always dressed beautifully and—and—and in perfect taste.

ZOE.

Beautifully!

THEODORE.

If you were *not* well-dressed, I should venture to call your attention to it.

ZOE.

Silence is approval?

THEODORE.

Absolutely. So don't expect me—a busy man—to be eternally praising your gowns and what not; because I cannot and will not do it.

ZOE.

I won't—I won't. I know I'm inconsiderate—[*stamping her foot*] beastly inconsiderate. [*Excitedly.*] Write out a telegram now ——

THEODORE.

Telegram?

ZOE.

To the hotel.

THEODORE.

Yes, that 'ud be wise. [*He rises and goes over to the writing-table where, taking a sheet of note-paper, he sits and writes.*] We couldn't get an answer to a letter.

ZOE.

[*Jumping up and walking about.*] Jolly nice rooms, Theo!

THEODORE.

[*Assentingly.*] H'm, h'm.

ZOE.

[*Humming.*] Tra, la! ra, la! la, ra, la——!

THEODORE.

[*In the throes of composition.*] Sssh, sssh!

ZOE.

[*Opening the illustrated paper.*] Beg pardon.

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "——deux bonnes chambres à coucher—salle de bain—et salon——"

ZOE.

There's Lena. Don't forget the maid.

THEODORE.

Oh, they shove her anywhere.

ZOE.

[*Imperatively.*] No, no; I must have her handy. [*He writes.*] What hotel are we going to, Theo?

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "——aussi chambre pour servante même étage——"

ZOE.

The Ritz?

THEODORE.

Oh, blow the Ritz!

ZOE.

We've always *been* comfortable at the Ritz.

THEODORE.

[*Putting the finishing touches to his telegram.*] Twenty francs a minute.

ZOE.

[*Disappointed.*] Where then? The Elysée Palace is too far out this weather. The Régina?

THEODORE.

[*Reading.*] "Pouvez-vous réserver pour Monsieur et Madame Blundell pour dimanche et nuits suivantes apartement composé deux bonnes chambres à coucher, salle de bain, et salon, aussi chambre pour servante même étage? Réponse télégraphique. Theodorus, London."

ZOE.

[*Advancing.*] Oh, Theo! Shall we try the new Meurice? The Langdales had a suite there that made them feel like Royalties.

THEODORE.

[*Half-turning to her.*] Gerald Duckfield was telling me of a capital little hotel where he and Bessie stayed—the Vendôme ——

ZOE.

Where's that?

THEODORE.

In the Place Vendôme.

ZOE.

The Ritz—the Bristol—the Rhin—they're the only hotels in the Place.

THEODORE.

Oh, but this is in the part of the Place that runs down to the top of the Rue Castiglione.

ZOE.

The *narrow* part!

THEODORE.

Well, it isn't the broad part, certainly.

ZOE.

The traffic of the Rue St. Honoré to help to send you to sleep!

THEODORE.

No, no; there are double windows, Gerald says, to the best bedrooms. [*Turning to the writing-table.*] It 'ud be an experiment.

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair in the middle of the room, with her back to him.*] Yes, it would be an experiment.

THEODORE.

Shall we risk it?

ZOE.

[*Coldly.*] By all means.

THEODORE.

[*Writing.*] "Directeur—Hôtel Vendôme

ZOE.

[*Tapping her feet upon the floor.*] Ha!

THEODORE.

H'm? "——Place Vendôme——"

ZOE.

[*Holding up the illustrated paper so that he may see, over her head, a* risqué *picture.*] If you were taking this sort of woman with you, nothing 'ud be good enough for her.

THEODORE.

[*Glancing at the picture, angrily.*] Oh, don't be so coarse! [*There is a pause. He leans back in his chair, biting his pen. Suddenly she flings the illustrated paper away from her into the air. Throwing down his pen, he rises and paces the room.*] This promises well for an enjoyable fortnight in Paris!

ZOE.

[*Rising and moving to the left.*] Look here, old man! This trip was going to be *your* treat. Very well, that's off! I'll take *you* to Paris; *I'll* pay the expenses; and I won't stuff you up in a frowsy rabbit-hutch.

THEODORE.

[*Coming forward on the right.*] Don't insult me!

ZOE.

[*Facing him.*] Anyway, your treat or mine, I stay at no hotel in Paris that isn't top-hole.

THEODORE.

[*Furiously.*] Oh, stop your damned slang, for God's sake!

ZOE.

[*Her eyes blazing.*] What!

THEODORE.

[*Sitting on the fauteuil-stool and rocking himself to and fro.*] Oh! Oh!

ZOE.

Stop my damned slang!

THEODORE.

[*His head in his hands.*] Hold your tongue!

ZOE.

[*Coming to him.*] And how did I learn my damned slang, pray? [*He waves her from him.*] I learnt it from the crew you surrounded me with when I condescended to marry you and went out of my world into yours.

THEODORE.

[*Starting up.*] Oh ——!

[*He goes to the bell and rings it continuously.*

ZOE.

[*Following him.*] Yes, you were hugely tickled by it *then!* And so were *they*—the men you thought might be serviceable to you; and who *were* serviceable to you, often through *me!*

THEODORE.

Oh!

ZOE.

Ha! And now that my tongue's furred with it, and it isn't necessary to attract the vulgar brutes any more, you round on me and rag me! [*Pacing the room on the left.*] Oh! Oh! If only my dear old dad were alive! He'd fuss over me and protect me. My father was a gentleman. He warned me I was chucking myself away!

THEODORE.

Oh!

ZOE.

[*Wildly.*] Why do you keep on ringing that bell?

THEODORE.

[*In a loud voice.*] I suppose I can ring the bell if I like!

ZOE.

You—you can go to the devil if you like!

[*She goes out at the glazed door. As she disappears,* WARREN *passes her and enters.*

THEODORE.

[*Crossing to the writing-table.*] Warren ——

WARREN.

Yessir?

THEODORE.

[*Picking up the sheet of paper on which he has written the message to the hotel.*] Pack me a bag.

WARREN.

Bag, sir?

THEODORE.

[*Tearing the paper into small pieces.*] Yes; I'm not sleeping at home to-night.

WARREN.

[*Coming to the table and preparing to remove the tea-things.*] Very good, sir.

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

The scene is the same, but the disposition of some of the furniture is changed. The settee on the right is now placed with its back to the fireplace. At the further end of the settee are the oblong table and chair, and on the left of the table, facing the settee, is the chair which in the preceding act stood in the middle of the room. An armchair is at the nearer end of the settee; and another armchair and the fauteuil-stool stand together, not far from the glazed door.

On the oblong table are a box of cigarettes, matches, and an ash-tray.

The fireplace is banked with flowers, there are flowers in vases upon the tables, and the room is full of sunlight.

[*Two men—an upholsterer and his assistant—are engaged in putting covers of gay chintz upon the chairs and settees. The upholsterer is on his knees at the settee on the right, the assistant is at the chair by the writing-table.* LENA, ZOE'S *maid—a bright, buxom woman—is arranging the furniture in the middle of the room. Presently the assistant proceeds to collect the brown paper and cord which litter the floor.*

UPHOLSTERER.

[*Rising from his knees—to* LENA.] That's all right.

LENA.

[*Coming to him.*] And when are we to have the pleasure of seeing *you* again?

UPHOLSTERER.

To-morrow.

LENA.

What about next year, or the year after! [*Producing her purse and giving him a tip.*] In case I shouldn't live so long.

UPHOLSTERER.

Thank you very much. [*Moving away—quietly.*] William ——

[*The assistant, laden with brown paper, advances, and* LENA *tips him.*

ASSISTANT.

Thank you, miss. Good-morning, miss.

LENA.

Good-morning.

UPHOLSTERER.

[*At the glazed door.*] Good-morning.

LENA.

[*Tidying the furniture on the right.*] Good-morning.

[*The men depart. Almost immediately, the glazed door is reopened and* WARREN *appears, showing in* LEONARD. LEONARD *is gloved and is carrying a straw hat and a walking-cane. He has lost his fresh, boyish appearance and is sallow and lined.*

LEONARD.

[*To* LENA.] Good-morning.

LENA.

[*Familiarly.*] Oh, good-morning. [*To* WARREN.] I'll let Mrs. Blundell know. [*To* LEONARD, *as* WARREN

withdraws.] She'll be down soon. Will you have a paper?

LEONARD.

Thanks; seen 'em. How is she, Lena?

LENA.

Middling. She's a little feverish, the doctor says. She must have caught a chill coming over. [LEONARD *nods.*] She would sit on deck, talking to Mr. Mallandain. We met him by accident on the platform as we were leaving Paris.

LEONARD.

[*Nodding again.*] She's told me.

LENA.

She's to remain indoors again to-day and keep out o' draughts. [*Looking at a watch which she wears on her wrist and at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] What do you say the right time is?

LEONARD.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Quarter to twelve.

LENA.

[*Going to the mantelpiece.*] I'm to give her her medicine an hour before meals. [*Moving the hands of the clock.*] Ha! They've all been playing tricks here while we've been away, clock-winder included.

LEONARD.

[*Absently.*] Indeed?

LENA.

Servants, tradespeople, everybody! [*Unbuckling her bracelet.*] Because Mrs. Blundell is now on her own, I

s'pose they fancy they can take advantage of her. [*Returning to* LEONARD.] I'll teach 'em! [*"Timing" her watch.*] Think we're getting fairly straight?

LEONARD.

[*Glancing idly at the room as he sits in the armchair near the glazed door.*] Wonderfully.

LENA.

Not bad, is it, considering we've been home only two days?

LEONARD.

[*Placing his hat and cane upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Capital.

LENA.

[*Refastening her bracelet.*] Ouf! The relief, after some of those foreign hotels!

LEONARD.

[*Drawing off his gloves.*] Tired of traveling, eh?

LENA.

Don't ask me! I was saying to Mrs. Killick at breakfast—I've had enough of Italy to last me my life. Over four months of it, and without a courier! [*Going toward the glazed door.*] That's a bit too stiff.

LEONARD.

It is rather.

LENA.

[*Halting by him and dropping her voice slightly.*] Not that we wanted a courier when *you* came out to us. A splendid courier you were; I couldn't wish for a better.

LEONARD.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Ha, ha!

LENA.

[*Laughing.*] Do you remember our losing her hat-box at that wretched old Siena?

LEONARD.

Yes—yes.

LENA.

You woke 'em up there in grand style. Ha, ha! Your friend, the Italian policeman—the image in the feathers ——!

LEONARD.

Ha, ha!

LENA.

You did give him a dressing! [*Sobering herself.*] Yes, those three or four weeks you were with us were the pleasantest o' the lot, to my idea. [*Going.*] Well, good-day. [*Stopping again.*] Oh, but I must show you this. [*Taking a ring from her finger.*] A present from her—last Saturday—one of the best shops in the Roo Royarl. [*Handing it to him.*] She went out and bought it herself.

LEONARD.

Turquoise ——

LENA.

And diamonds.

LEONARD.

[*Returning the ring.*] Beautiful.

LENA.

Wasn't it kind of her! I'm as vain as a peacock. [*Replacing the ring on her finger.*] But there, you've both been extremely good to me.

LEONARD.

Not at all.

LENA.

You have; you've spoilt me completely. [*At the door, speaking louder.*] Treacherous weather for June, isn't it?

LEONARD.

Very.

LENA.

[*In the corridor.*] Oh, here you are! Here's Mr. Ferris—I was just coming up to tell you ——

[LEONARD *rises as* ZOE *appears in the corridor. She is dressed in an elegant robe of rich, soft material and carries a little bag in which are a few opened letters, her handkerchief, etc. She also is changed. Her face is wan and there are dark circles round her eyes.*

ZOE.

Ah? [*To* LEONARD, *formally, as she enters the room.*] Good-morning.

LEONARD.

Good-morning.

ZOE.

Lena, how charming the old chintz looks!

LENA.

[*Who is lingering.*] It's English!

ZOE.

[*Laying her bag upon the oblong table.*] If we could all be freshened up by the same process!

LENA.

[*Her hand on the door-handle.*] Don't forget you're to take your med'cine in three-quarters of an hour.

ZOE.

Oh, bring me the filthy stuff when you like.

LENA.

[*In the corridor, closing the door.*] Now, don't be naughty.

[*As the woman disappears,* LEONARD *walks over to* ZOE. *She puts out her hand to check him, and they stand for a moment or two watching the door and listening. Then she drops her hand and turns her face to him perfunctorily, and he kisses her as a matter of course.*

ZOE.

Your motor isn't outside?

LEONARD.

No; I walked across the Park.

ZOE.

That yellow car of yours is so conspicuous. [*Arranging a pillow on the settee.*] Sorry I wasn't visible yesterday.

LEONARD.

You're better?

ZOE.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, more or less decrepit. [*Sitting.*] What have you been doing with yourself?

LEONARD.

Nothing much. [*Sitting in the armchair opposite to her.*] Except——

ZOE.

[*Taking her bag from the table.*] By-the-bye, I've had a note this morning from an old friend of yours.

LEONARD.

Who?

ZOE.

[*Producing a letter from the bag.*] Ethel Pierpoint.

LEONARD.

[*Inexpressively.*] Oh? [*She extracts the letter from its envelope and tosses it across to him. He reads it silently, with a frown. She takes a cigarette from the box on the table.*] I thought you'd dropped her.

ZOE.

I did, in a fashion. I stopped her letters by ceasing to answer them. [*Striking a match.*] I hated calling myself hers affectionately, knowing I'd been the cause of your slacking away from her.

LEONARD.

[*Under his breath.*] Pish!

ZOE.

[*Lighting her cigarette.*] *What* does she say?

LEONARD.

[*Reading aloud.*] "Dearest Zoe. Quite by chance I hear you are back at Lancaster Gate. Why do you still make no sign? I never wanted your friendship more than now—or the friendship of somebody who will give

me good advice, or a sound shaking for being a fool. Please take pity on your troubled but ever devoted, Ethel Drayson Pierpoint." [*To* ZOE.] What does she mean by never wanting your friendship more than now? [ZOE *shakes her head. He continues to ponder over the letter.*] "—or the friendship of somebody who will give me good advice, or a sound shaking for being a fool."

ZOE.

[*Smoking, thoughtfully.*] When did you see the Pierpoints last?

LEONARD.

About a month after you left London—just before I followed you. [*Returning the letter to her.*] I cooled off them gradually.

ZOE.

[*After a pause.*] She's a nice girl—Ethel.

LEONARD.

Ye—es, she was nice enough.

[*There is a further pause. Then* ZOE *jumps up, as if to dismiss disagreeable reflections, and crosses to the writing-table. There she empties her bag of the letters it contains.*

LEONARD.

[*Gloomily.*] Am I in the way?

ZOE.

[*Fretfully.*] Of course not. [*She sits at the writing-table and busies herself with rereading her letters and destroying some of them.* LEONARD *rises and takes a cigarette from the box.*] Poor Robby Relf has got neuritis.

LEONARD.

[*Lighting his cigarette.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Eh?

LEONARD.

I was going to tell you—I dined at the Carlton last night.

ZOE.

[*Indifferently.*] Oh?

LEONARD.

With Cossy Rawlings. Guess who was there.

ZOE.

[*Becoming attentive.*] Dun'no.

LEONARD.

He didn't see me—he was at a table the other side of the room——

ZOE.

[*Holding her breath.*] Theodore?

LEONARD.

Yes.

[*She throws the pieces of a letter into the waste-paper basket and leans back in her chair.*

ZOE.

How—how did he look?

LEONARD.

[*Curling his lip.*] I didn't study his appearance.

ZOE.

He—he wasn't—by himself?

LEONARD.

Hardly!

ZOE.

That—that woman?

LEONARD.

[*Nodding.*] Same lady.

ZOE.

Simply the two?

LEONARD.

[*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] The two turtle doves.

[*After a brief silence, she pushes her letters from her, rises, and moves about the room quietly but agitatedly.*

ZOE.

Who is this creature?

LEONARD.

[*Impatiently.*] I've told you—and Jim told you on Sunday.

ZOE.

Hatherly—Annerly ——?

LEONARD.

Her husband was a Major Annerly—Frank Annerly. He divorced her over a man of the name of Bettison.

ZOE.

Where's *he?*

LEONARD.

He's dead. She's been through a good many hands since.

ZOE.

Ho!

LEONARD.

Fred Wishart was one—and Tod Arnold——

ZOE.

She's quite young, isn't she?

LEONARD.

Looks a baby.

ZOE.

Ha!

LEONARD.

I should put her at thirty,

ZOE.

Pretty? They all are!

LEONARD.

Passable.

ZOE.

[*Behind the chair on the left of the oblong table.*] Do you think she's—with him?

LEONARD.

Not regularly. She's still living in Egerton Crescent, according to Cossy.

ZOE.

[*Gripping the back of the chair.*] She'll ruin him; she'll ruin him, Len.

LEONARD.

Oh, I dare say there'll be a bit left, when she's done with him.

ZOE.

There are other ways of dragging a man down besides through his pocket. Jim Mallandain says she's a vampire.

LEONARD.

Why should you worry yourself——?

ZOE.

I don't want him to come to grief. Why should I?

LEONARD.

If he does, you've nothing to reproach yourself with.

ZOE.

[*Giving him a swift look.*] *What!*

LEONARD.

[*Sullenly.*] Oh, you know what I mean—nothing that occurred before he took himself off.

ZOE.

[*Moving to the oblong table, with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah-h-h! [*Sitting, her elbows on the table, leaning her head on her hand.*] It will always be on my conscience that I drove him away.

LEONARD.

You didn't drive him away.

ZOE.

I did.

LEONARD.

You were quite justified in doing it, anyhow. He made your life a burden to you.

ZOE.

I might have been more patient with him; I might have waited.

LEONARD.

Waited?

ZOE.

Waited till we'd got through the middle period of our lives. [*Raising her head.*] Peter warned us, the very day we parted ——

LEONARD.

[*Sneeringly.*] Peter!

ZOE.

Mid-Channel! We should soon have reached the other side.

LEONARD.

There's a limit to human endurance; you'd passed it.

ZOE.

[*Staring before her.*] It seems to me now, there wasn't so very much for me to put up with—not so very much. [*Rising and walking to the back of the settee on which* LEONARD *is sitting.*] There was a lot of good in him, really. After all, he only needed managing, humoring ——

LEONARD.

[*Starting up and turning to her.*] Upon my soul, Zoe! Ha! You're discovering no end of fine qualities in him suddenly!

ZOE.

[*Bitterly.*] Am I!

LEONARD.

You hadn't a decent word for him when we were in Italy! Now he's perfect!

ZOE.

[*Facing him.*] No, he's not.

LEONARD.

[*Satirically.*] Sounds like it.

ZOE.

[*Flaring up.*] Neither he nor you! You can be just as unkind to me as he ever was.

LEONARD.

[*Angrily.*] I!

ZOE.

Yes! And, with all his faults, he did try to take care of me—to keep me from harm! [*Her eyes ablaze.*] My God, what have *you* done!

[*They remain confronting one another for a moment without speaking. Then he turns away abruptly and picks up his hat and cane. She runs after him and clings to him.*

ZOE.

No, no; don't be hasty. I didn't mean it—I didn't mean it——

LEONARD.

[*Endeavoring to free himself.*] Let me go ——

ZOE.

Ah, no! I'm not well to-day ——

LEONARD.

I'll come back when you're better tempered.

ZOE.

I *am* better tempered. Look! it's all over. [*Coaxing him to give up his hat and cane.*] Lenny—Lenny dear—Lenny —— [*Placing the hat and cane upon the writing-table, she takes her handkerchief from her bag and dries her eyes. He sits in the armchair near the glazed door sulkily.*] Ha, ha! Now you're beginning to see what sort of a time poor Theo had with me.

LEONARD.

Oh, can't you leave off talking about him for a single second!

ZOE.

[*Coming to him meekly.*] I beg your pardon, dear.

LEONARD.

You've got that fellow on the brain.

ZOE.

[*Standing behind him.*] You started it, by telling me of last night.

LEONARD.

Why the deuce *shouldn't* I tell you of last night! Do sit down. [*She sits near him, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] I can't make you out, Zo. This woman's only what we've been waiting for. I've said all along he'd soon give you

an opportunity of divorcing him. She completes your case for you.

ZOE.

[*Dully.*] Yes.

LEONARD.

[*Grumbling.*] You ought to be tremendously obliged to Jim for being the first to open your eyes—my eyes too —to what's going on. Instead of which, you're upset by it. And now, because *I've* seen Blundell and the lady together, I'm favored by hearing Mr. B. described as a model husband ——

ZOE.

[*To silence him.*] Ah ——!

LEONARD.

[*Changing his tone.*] When do you interview your lawyers?

ZOE.

I—I haven't written to them yet.

LEONARD.

You were to do it after I left you on Monday.

ZOE.

I—I've been feeling so cheap, Len.

LEONARD.

[*With a short laugh.*] We shall be gray-haired before we're married, at this rate. [*She lays her hand on his appeasingly. He retains her hand.*] I believe you'll have to go through the form of trying to compel Blundell to return to you. Of course, he'll refuse. Meanwhile we must have the lady's house watched—or Blundell's flat.

I shouldn't be surprised if he'd arrange that part of the business with you, to save trouble and expense. Drop a line to Maxwells to-day, will you?

ZOE.

[*Obediently.*] Yes.

LEONARD.

Or ring them up. You'll be able to get out to-morrow —or one of them would wait on you.

ZOE.

Yes.

LEONARD.

That's right, old girlie. Kiss me. [*They kiss, quickly and cautiously, without ardor.*] Sorry.

ZOE.

[*Turning to him and lowering her voice almost to a whisper.*] Lenny ——

LEONARD.

What?

ZOE.

Don't forget—Perugia.

LEONARD.

[*In an outburst.*] Oh, yes—curse the place!—let's forget Perugia. I was off my head there. I behaved like a blackguard. You needn't be continually throwing it in my teeth.

ZOE.

No, no; I'm not scolding you again. [*Gently.*] What I mean is—your breaking your word to me at Perugia—staying in the same hotel ——

LEONARD.

Well?

ZOE.

If Theodore's solicitors got hold of that ——

LEONARD.

[*Rising and walking away.*] Yes, but they won't get hold of it.

ZOE.

[*Twisting herself round toward him.*] You remember our meeting Claud Lowenstein at the railway station at Arezzo?

LEONARD.

I explained to him that my being in the train with you was pure chance. I made that square.

ZOE.

He was going on to Perugia—to the Brufani. [*Rising.*] He may have been suspicious—he may have inquired ——

LEONARD.

Even that little swine wouldn't tell tales.

ZOE.

[*Coming to him.*] Then there's Lena—they might pump Lena ——

LEONARD.

My dear girl, all this would be very terrible if Blundell wasn't as anxious to get rid of you as we are to get rid of him. No, you take my word for it—he won't defend. His game is to be free at any price.

ZOE.

To marry again perhaps!

LEONARD.

Probably.

ZOE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Ah, no!

LEONARD.

[*His brow darkening again.*] Doesn't *that* please you? There's no satisfying you, Zoe. [*She leaves him and paces the room distractedly.*] A minute ago you were frightened lest he should be ruined by Mrs. Annerly!

ZOE.

[*On the left.*] I—I couldn't bear the idea of another woman being a better wife to him than I was! I couldn't bear it, Lenny!

LEONARD.

Why, what concern would it be of yours——!

ZOE.

[*With a gesture, as the glazed door opens.*] Sssh!

[WARREN *appears.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] I beg your pardon, ma'am—Mr. Mottram.

ZOE.

[*Uttering a little, eager cry.*] Ah!

WARREN.

He'll call again, ma'am, if you're engaged.

ZOE.

Did you say I—I'd anybody with me?

WARREN.

No, ma'am.

ZOE.

[*After a slight pause—indicating the adjoining room.*] Is that room still covered up?

WARREN.

Yes, ma'am.

ZOE.

Well—show him in there for the moment.

WARREN.

Yes, ma'am. [*He withdraws, closing the door.*

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD, *in a low voice.*] He'd better not find you here so early.

LEONARD.

[*Also dropping his voice, testily.*] Why need you bother yourself with old Peter this morning?

ZOE.

[*Bringing* LEONARD *his hat and cane.*] I haven't seen him since January. Don't look so cross. [*Caressing his cheek.*] Are you engaged to lunch anywhere?

LEONARD.

No.

ZOE.

Will you eat your lunch with me?

[*He nods. She takes a powder-puff from her bag and, looking into the hand-mirror, hurriedly removes the traces of her tears. While she is thus occupied,* LEONARD *listens at the nearer door on the right.*

LEONARD.

[*Leaving the door—in a whisper.*] He's there.

[WARREN *reappears.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] Mr. Mottram is in the next room, ma'am.

ZOE.

Thank you. [WARREN *withdraws.*

ZOE.

[*To* LEONARD, *in a whisper, accompanying him to the glazed door.*] Go into the Park and sit under the trees. Blow a kiss for me to all the kiddies. [*She watches him disappear down the corridor. Then, having closed the glazed door, she opens the further door on the right.*] Peter!

PETER.

[*Out of sight.*] My dear lady!

ZOE.

[*Going into the next room.*] Why on earth have they put you into this dismal room! Come into the light. [*Returning with him, her arm tucked through his.*] Oh, my dear Peter—my dear Peter ——!

PETER.

Ah, yes, yes, yes! A nice way to serve a pal!

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] How did you ——?

PETER.

Jim Mallandain dropped in at the office this morning. [*They leave the door.*] He traveled with you from Paris on Sunday.

ZOE.

I collided with him at the Gare du Nord.

PETER.

And this is Wednesday!

ZOE.

[*Withdrawing her arm.*] I funked sending for you; that's a fact.

PETER.

Funked it?

ZOE.

[*With the air of a child in disgrace.*] Your letters to me have been awfully sweet, but I know you despise me for making a muck of things.

PETER.

[*Protestingly.*] Ah, Mrs. Zoe!

ZOE.

And I'm rather a sick rabbit, Peter. [*Turning away.*] A sick rabbit has only one desire—to hide in its burrow. [*Facing him.*] My heart bounded when you were announced, though.

PETER.

[*Following her.*] You don't look very fit. Seen a doctor?

ZOE.

I've let Lena call in Rashleigh, to humor her; [*sitting on the settee on the right*] and I've promised to swallow his pig-wash.

PETER.

What's he say?

ZOE.

Chill; but—[*raising her eyes to his*] between ourselves?——

PETER.

Honor.

ZOE.

[*With quivering lips.*] Life, dear old chum!

PETER.

[*Tenderly.*] Ain't much in it?

ZOE.

Dam little. [*Putting her hair back from her brow.*] Phew! Can't sleep, Peter.

PETER.

Oh, lor!

ZOE.

I tumble into bed at twelve—one—two. I get an hour's stupor, from sheer fatigue, and then I'm wide awake—thinking! Then, dressing-gown and slippers and the cigarettes; and then it's to and fro, up and down—smoke

—smoke—smoke—often till the servants start brushing the stairs. No game, eh?

PETER.

How long has this ——?

ZOE.

It began at—[*checking herself*] oh, a devil of a while. [*With a shiver.*] But I'm worse now I've set foot again in this house.

PETER.

[*Eyeing her keenly.*] Ghosts? [*Avoiding his gaze, she stretches out her hand toward the cigarette box. He pushes the box beyond her reach. She makes a grimace. There is a pause.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

Well?

PETER.

[*Deliberately.*] Why shouldn't you pick up the pieces?

ZOE.

Pick up—the pieces?

PETER.

You and Theodore.

ZOE.

Oh—don't be—funny, Peter.

PETER.

I'm not funny; I'm as serious as the clown at the circus. [*Another pause.*] Write to him—or give me a message to take to him. *See* him.

[*She gets to her feet and attempts to pass* PETER.

He detains her and she sinks back among her pillows.

ZOE.

Ha, ha! You ridiculous man! [*Faintly.*] Pick up the pieces! As if that were possible!

PETER.

Oh, the valuable family china is in a good many fragments, I admit. But there *are* the fragments, lyin' on the carpet. They can be collected, fitted together.

ZOE.

[*With a sudden gesture of entreaty.*] Ah, for God's sake, Peter——!

PETER.

Why, I'm suggestin' nothin' unusual.

ZOE.

[*Repeating her gesture.*] Sssh!

PETER.

Go into the homes of three-fifths of the married people you know—*I* know—and you'll find some imposin' specimens of porcelain that won't bear inspectin' very narrowly.

ZOE.

[*Waving the subject away.*] Sssh, sssh!

PETER.

Only yesterday afternoon I was callin' at a house in—never mind the district. I was wanderin' round the drawin'-room, lookin' at the *bric-à-brac*, and there, on a Louis Quatorze console-table, were as handsome a pair of old Chinese jars—genuine Mings—as ever I've met

with. Such a sooperb glaze they've got, such depth o' color! They appear to be priceless, perfect, till you examine 'em closely; and then ——! My dear Zoe, they're cracked; they've both had a nasty knock at some time or another; they're scarred shockin'ly with rivets and cement. And while I was sheddin' tears over 'em, in sailed madam, smilin' and holdin' out her hand to me—she'd been up-stairs, rubbin' carmine on her lips ——

ZOE.

[*In a murmur.*] You horror!

PETER.

How kind of me to call—and how wild Tom 'ud be at missin' me! To the casual observer, she's the happiest woman goin'; and Tom, who strolled in just as I was leavin', might be the most domesticated of husbands. You follow me? You grasp the poetic allegory? Those faulty old Mings are emblematic of the establishment they adorn. Mr. and Mrs. Tom fell out years ago; they turned against each other one fine day—in mid-Channel—and hadn't the sense to kiss and be friends on landin'; their lives are as damaged as those wounded crocks of theirs on the console-table. [*Persuasively.*] Well, but ain't it wiser to repair the broken china, rather than chuck the bits into the dust-bin? It's still showy and effective at a distance; and there are cases—rare, but they exist—where the mendin's been done so neatly that the flaws are almost imperceptible. [*Seating himself opposite* ZOE.] Zoe ——

ZOE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Yes, Peter?

PETER.

[*Leaning forward.*] I believe yours is one of the cases—yours and Theodore's—where the mendin' would be exceptionally successful.

ZOE.

What do you—what do you mean?

PETER.

My dear, old Theo is as miserable over this affair as you are.

ZOE.

[*Attempting a disdainful smile.*] N-nonsense!

PETER.

Oh, no, it ain't nonsense.

ZOE.

W-what makes you think that?

PETER.

Between ourselves?

ZOE.

[*A note of eagerness in her voice.*] Honor.

PETER.

He shows it in all manner o' ways. Neglects his business—ain't much good at it when he doesn't—is losin' his grip—looks confoundedly ill—*is* ill. Altogether he's a different man from the man he was, even when matters were at boilin' point here.

ZOE.

[*Locking and unlocking her fingers.*] Does he ever—speak of me?

PETER.

Oh, lor', yes.

ZOE.

N-not kindly?

PETER.

Very. Very kindly.

ZOE.

[*After a silence, as if in pain.*] Oh ——! [*She rises, passes him, and goes to the other side of the room where she moves from one piece of furniture to another aimlessly.*] W-what's he say about me?

PETER.

[*Not turning.*] Frets about you—wonders how you're gettin' along—wonders as to the state of your finances—can't bear the idea of your bein' in the least pinched—wants to help you.

ZOE.

He's extremely generous!

PETER.

Theo? Never was anythin' else.

ZOE.

[*Her eyes flashing.*] His own expenses must be pretty considerable just now, too!

PETER.

[*Pricking up his ears.*] Must they? [*With great artlessness.*] Why?

ZOE.

Oh, do you imagine I live with wool in my ears?

PETER.

[*Over his shoulder.*] Wool ——?

ZOE.

This woman he's continually with! [PETER'S *face is still averted from* ZOE. *At this juncture his eyes open widely and his mouth shapes to a whistle.*] This—Mrs.—Mrs.—what's her name—Annerly! [*Pacing the room.*] A notorious woman—a woman without a shred of character—an any-man's-woman ——!

PETER.

[*Settling his features and turning his chair toward* ZOE *—in a tone of expostulation.*] Oh!

ZOE.

A baby-faced thing—seven years younger than I am! Precisely the class of goods a man of Theo's age flies at!

PETER.

Oh—oh ——!

ZOE.

They're rather costly articles, aren't they?

PETER.

My dear Mrs. Zoe ——

ZOE.

Oh, don't you pretend to be so innocent, Peter! You know jolly well he's all over the place with her. They were at Hurlingham together Saturday week.

PETER.

[*Coolly.*] I dessay.

ZOE.

And they dine *tête-à-tête* at the Savoy, Ritz's, the Carlton ——

PETER.

Who supplies the information?

ZOE.

They were at the Carlton last night.

PETER.

Who's told you *that?*

ZOE.

L—— [*She pulls herself up.*

PETER.

[*Curiously.*] Who?

ZOE.

[*Moistening her lips.*] Oh, I—I first heard of it all from Jim Mallandain. He was full of it on board the boat on Sunday.

PETER.

Was he! [*Rising lazily.*] A busy gentleman—Jim.

ZOE.

It was Jim who met them at Hurlingham—had tea with 'em.

PETER.

[*Curiously again.*] But it can't be Jim who's blabbed about last night.

ZOE.

Why?

PETER.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] He happened to mention this mornin' that he was with a party at Jules'.

ZOE.

[*Confused.*] N-no, it isn't from Jim I've got that. I—[*throwing herself into the armchair near the glazed door.*] Oh, but really it's a matter of supreme indifference to me, Peter, my dear boy, whom Theodore entertains at the Carlton, or whom he entertains at his flat ——

PETER.

[*Coming to her.*] My dear Zoe ——

ZOE.

[*Laughing heartily.*] Ha, ha, ha! His flat! I hear it's quite sumptuous. After his pathetic yearnings for peace and quiet in a garret, he sets up, within a month of our separating, in an enormous flat in Cavendish Square! I received that bit of news when I was in Florence. I—I was intensely amused. Oh, let him wallow in his precious flat ——!

PETER.

[*Argumentatively.*] My dear lady ——

ZOE.

[*Her hand to her brow, exhausted.*] Ah, drop it, Peter; drop it!

PETER.

I ask you—a liberal-minded person—what 'ud become of friendship as an institootion if men and women couldn't be pals without havin' the—the—what-d'ye-call-it—the tongue of scandal wagged at 'em? The world 'ud be intolerable. It ain't all marmalade as it is; but if a fellow can't take the fresh air in the company of a female at Hurlingham, or give her a bite o' food at a restaurant ——

ZOE.

[*Her head against the back of her chair, her eyes closed.*] Ah, la, la, la!

PETER.

As for this—er—this Mrs. Annerly ——

[*He again purses his mouth and is evidently in a difficulty.*

ZOE.

[*Her eyes still shut.*] Well?

PETER.

It's true she chucked Annerly for another chap. I don't condone an act of that description—except that I knew Annerly, and if ever there was a dull dog ——

ZOE.

Was he duller than Theo?

PETER.

Oh, go on with yer! And since then she's been a trifle—flighty—perhaps, now and again; [*with a gulp*] but to-day she might be your maiden aunt.

ZOE.

[*Dreamily.*] You humbug, Peter!

PETER.

[*Sitting beside her, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Oh, I'm not maintainin' that we men always select our women pals from the right basket. I'm not sayin' that we don't make asses of ourselves occasionally, sometimes from sentiment, sometimes from vanity, sometimes from—various causes. But the same remark applies to you women over your men-pals. [*Laying a hand on her arm.*] For instance—[*she opens her eyes*] for instance, here you

are, throwin' stones at old Theo with regard to Alice Annerly. [*Significantly.*] My dear, there are a few panes o' glass in the house *you* live in, bear in mind.

[*She sits upright, looking at him.*

ZOE.

In the house—I ——?

PETER.

[*Gravely.*] Mrs. Zoe, what you did when you were under your husband's protection is one thing; what you do now is another bag o' nuts entirely. And a woman situated as you are ought to be careful of retainin' a cub among her intimates.

ZOE.

A cub?

PETER.

Cub.

ZOE.

[*Apprehensively.*] To whom—are you alluding?

PETER.

Lenny Ferris.

ZOE.

L—enny?

PETER.

It ain't an agreeable job, pitchin' into a fellow you've been on good terms with; but the fact remains—to put it mildly—that Master Lenny's a stoopid, blunderin' cub.

ZOE.

[*Haughtily but palpitatingly.*] He's nothing of the kind. What has he done that you should abuse him?

PETER.

It's he who's told you that Theodore was at the Carlton last night, ain't it? [*She drops her eyes.*] Been here this mornin'?

ZOE.

[*Raising her eyes, boldly.*] Yes.

PETER.

H'm! The sick rabbit doesn't hide in her burrow from everybody.

ZOE.

H—how——?

PETER.

I saw your lips make an L just now, before you could put the stopper on.

ZOE.

Ha, ha! You ought to have been a professional detective.

PETER.

[*Scowling.*] Ferris has kept out of my way lately, or I——

ZOE.

If he *has* run in here for a moment—to ask whether I'm back—is there anything particularly cubbish in that?

PETER.

It wasn't *that* I was referrin' to.

ZOE.

N—no?

PETER.

I was referrin' to his havin' the damned presumption to dance attendance on you in Italy.

ZOE.

[*Aghast.*] I—Italy?

PETER.

He was at Perugia while you were there.

ZOE.

Oh—Perugia——

PETER.

[*With a shrug.*] And other places, I assoom.

ZOE.

[*After a pause, pulling herself together.*] H—ho! [*mimicking* PETER.] And who supplies the information? [PETER *waves the question from him.*] Lowenstein, by any chance—Claud Lowenstein? [PETER, *looking down his nose, is silent. She rises and walks away from him.*] The hound—the little hound!

PETER.

Lowenstein came across you both at some railway station. He arrived at Perugia the day you left.

ZOE.

[*Pacing the room on the right.*] The contemptible little hound!

PETER.

He put up at the Brufani too.

ZOE.

[*Stopping in her walk—under her breath.*] Ah!

PETER.

Master Lenny might at least have had the common decency to quarter himself at another hotel.

ZOE.

The—the Brufani is the most comfortable—the —— [*A pause.*] I—I suppose it *was* thoughtless of Lenny.

PETER.

[*Quietly.*] Cub!

ZOE.

[*Approaching* PETER.] Does—Theodore—know?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] Lowenstein went to him with it.

ZOE.

Ha, ha! A busy gentleman—Claudy Lowenstein! [*Falteringly.*] It—it was all my fault, Peter. If—if anybody's to blame, I am. I—I wrote to the boy from Florence—complaining of feeling lonely ——

PETER.

That doesn't excuse him.

ZOE.

[*Touching* PETER'S *shoulder with the tips of her fingers.*] What—what does Theodore ——?

PETER.

He's savage.

ZOE.

Savage?

PETER.

[*Rising.*] He'd like to punch Ferris's head—as I should.

ZOE.

[*In a low voice.*] Savage —— ! [*Slowly.*] He—he's jealous, then? [*A shrug from* PETER. *Her eyes light up.*] Jealous! [*A pause.*] Peter—no man's jealous over a woman—unless he—unless he cares for her! [*Plucking at his sleeve.*] Peter!

PETER.

You've heard me say old Theo's miserable—desperately wretched.

ZOE.

He—he's grown fond of me again—fond of me —— !

PETER.

My dear, you and he have never left off bein' fond o' one another, actually. As I warned you, you've only been tossin' about, both of you, on a bit o' troubled water.

[*She stares at him for a moment with an expressionless face and then, as if stupefied, seats herself in the chair on the left of the oblong table.*

PETER.

[*Standing before her.*] Well, at any rate, you'll let this Italian business be a lesson to you not to rush at conclusions respectin' other people. So, come now; won't you try to patch it up? I'll bet my noo hat, Theodore'll meet you half-way. [*Urgently.*] Zoe!

ZOE.

[*Locking and unlocking her fingers again.*] Peter ——

PETER.

Eh?

ZOE.

Your Mr. and Mrs. Tom—the world perhaps never heard of *their* fall-out.

PETER.

What o' that?

ZOE.

Everybody is aware of the split between me and Theo.

PETER.

Everybody! A handful! Besides, nothin' is even a nine days' wonder in these times. [*A pause.*] Will you do it?

ZOE.

[*Suddenly, starting up and walking away to the left.*] Oh, no, no, no! I can't—I can't!

PETER.

[*Following her.*] Can't?

ZOE.

[*Helplessly.*] I can't, Peter!

PETER.

[*Taking her by the arms.*] Oh ——!

ZOE.

I—I mean I—I'm sure it wouldn't answer—I'm sure ——

PETER.

My dear girl ——

ZOE.

[*Piteously.*] Ah, don't—don't! [*Escaping from him and crossing to the right.*] Oh, leave me alone!

[WARREN *enters at the glazed door.*

WARREN.

[*To* ZOE.] Miss Pierpoint is down-stairs, ma'am.

ZOE.

[*Seizing upon the interruption.*] Ah, yes!

WARREN.

I'm to give you her love, ma'am, and if it isn't convenient for you to see her——

ZOE.

It is—it *is*—quite convenient—quite. [WARREN *withdraws, closing the door.*] I'm awfully sorry, my dear Peter, but this child wants to consult me about something—something important. [*Giving him her hands.*] I must kick you out. You don't feel hurt, do you?

PETER.

[*Ruefully.*] Confound Miss Pierpoint! Zoe——

ZOE.

What?

PETER.

You'll think it over?

ZOE.

[*Putting her hand to his lips.*] Ah——!

PETER.

[*Holding her hand.*] No, no. Think it over. Ask me to dine with you one night next week.

ZOE.

Monday—Tuesday ——?

PETER.

Monday.

ZOE.

[*Artfully.*] Ah, but I shall lay in a chaperon for the occasion.

PETER.

Rats! How can I talk to you before a chaperon?

ZOE.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*She runs to the glazed door, opens it, and, going into the corridor, calls loudly and excitedly.*] Ethel—Ethel—Ethel ——! [ETHEL *appears in the corridor and* ZOE *embraces her with an excess of warmth.*] My dear Ethel! My dear child! [*They kiss.*] What ages since we've seen each other! [*Bringing* ETHEL *into the room.*] You know Mr. Mottram?

ETHEL.

[*Going to* PETER.] Oh, yes.

PETER.

[*Shaking hands with her.*] How-d'ye-do, Miss Pierpoint—and *au revoir.*

ETHEL.

[*As he moves toward the glazed door.*] I'm not driving you away?

PETER.

I forgive you.

[*He rejoins* ZOE, *who is near the door.* ETHEL *lays her sunshade upon the writing-table.*

ZOE.

[*To* PETER.] Monday night?

PETER.

Monday night.

ZOE.

Half-past eight.

PETER.

[*At the door, dropping his voice.*] A chaperon?

ZOE.

[*Mockingly.*] The proprieties!

PETER.

You cat! [*He goes.*

ZOE.

[*Closing the door.*] Ha, ha! [*She leans wearily against the door for a moment and again puts back her hair from her brow. Her manner now becomes strained, artificial, distrait. She advances to* ETHEL.] Now, then! [ETHEL *turns to her.*] Let me have a good squint at you. How's your dear mother?

ETHEL.

[*Who is pale and sad-looking.*] Mother's flourishing. [*Leaving the writing-table.*] You're not angry with me for rushing you at this hour?

ZOE.

Isn't this our old hour for a chat?

ETHEL.

We were at Madame Levine's yesterday—mother and I—ordering frocks, and Camille, the skirtmaker, told us you were back. Zoe, how unkind you've been!

ZOE.

Am I in your bad books?

ETHEL.

Why have you treated us so horridly?

ZOE.

Well, my dear child, the fact is—the fact is it suddenly dawned on me that perhaps your mother mightn't consider me any longer a suitable pal for her daughter.

ETHEL.

[*Protestingly.*] Oh!

ZOE.

Heaps of folks, you know, haven't much use for single married women.

ETHEL.

But we both showed you that our sympathies were on your side!

ZOE.

Yes, we often sympathize with people we wouldn't touch with the end of a wet umbrella.

ETHEL.

[*Coming close to* ZOE.] So that's the reason you left off answering my letters!

ZOE.

C-certainly.

ETHEL.

And why we hear of your return through fat old Camille! [*Fingering a jewel at* ZOE'S *neck.*] You've had a pleasant time abroad?

ZOE.

[*Taking* ETHEL'S *face between her hands, abruptly.*] How thin your face is, Ethel!

ETHEL.

[*Gazing at* ZOE.] *Your* cheeks are not as round as they were.

ZOE.

[*Leading* ETHEL *to the settee on the right.*] I caught a rotten chill on board the boat and have been beastly seedy. [*Putting* ETHEL *on the settee.*] What's wrong with you? That's a dreary note I've had from you this morning.

ETHEL.

[*Tracing a pattern on the floor with the point of her shoe.*] Now I'm with you, I—I can't——

ZOE.

[*Looking down upon her.*] You want advice, you say.

ETHEL.

[*Tremulously.*] Yes.

ZOE.

Or a good shaking.

ETHEL.

I—I suppose I ought to be ashamed of myself for being so, but I—I'm very unhappy, Zoe.

ZOE.

Unhappy?

ETHEL.

It's no use my attempting to talk to mother. Mother's a person who prides herself on her level-headedness.

Anybody with a fixed income and a poor circulation can be level-headed! It only means you're fish-like. But you—you're warm-blooded and human——

ZOE.

Well?

ETHEL.

Z-Zoe——

ZOE.

Yes?

ETHEL.

[*Her eyes on the ground.*] Did you ever suspect that there was anything between Mr. Ferris and me?

ZOE.

[*Calmly, steadying herself.*] Mr. Ferris—and you?

ETHEL.

An attachment.

ZOE.

[*With affected astonishment.*] My dear child!

ETHEL.

[*Looking up.*] Oh, don't keep on calling me "child"! I'm nearly six-and-twenty. [*Taking* ZOE'S *hands.*] *Didn't* you ever guess?

ZOE.

He—he always seemed delighted to meet you here.

ETHEL.

He's one of your "boys"—hasn't he ever talked to you about me?

ZOE.

Of course, frequently.

ETHEL.

Never as if he were—in love with me?

ZOE.

[*Withdrawing her hands.*] I—I can't say that it—struck me ——

ETHEL.

[*Dejectedly.*] You didn't know, perhaps, that at the beginning of the year—before you went away—he was a great deal in Sloane Street?

ZOE.

Why, yes, he used to have tea with you and your mother sometimes, didn't he? [*Turning from* ETHEL.] How did I hear that?

ETHEL.

[*Hanging her head.*] Very often he came early in the afternoon—by arrangement with me—while mother was resting.

ZOE.

[*With a hard laugh.*] Ha, ha! Ethel!

ETHEL.

Yes, worthy of a vulgar shop-girl, wasn't it?

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair opposite* ETHEL.] He—he came early in the afternoon ——?

ETHEL.

And we sat together, in the firelight. I'm sure he loved me, Zoe—then.

ZOE.

[*Breathing heavily.*] And—and *you* ——?

ETHEL.

[*Her elbows on her knees, hiding her face in her hands.*] Oh, I'm a fool—an awful fool!

ZOE.

[*After a silence.*] Did he ever—hint—at marriage? [ETHEL *nods, without uncovering her face.*] He did!

ETHEL.

[*Raising her head.*] Well, we got as far as agreeing that a small house in the country, near his aunt, would be an ideal state of existence. [*Mirthlessly.*] Ha, ha, ha! And there matters broke off.

ZOE.

What—what ——?

ETHEL.

All of a sudden there was a change—a change in his manner toward me. He still called on us, but not so regularly; and by degrees his visits—ceased altogether. [*She passes her hand across her eyes angrily and, stamping her foot, rises and moves to the other side of the room.*] The last time I spoke to him was one morning in the Row. Mother and I were walking and we came face to face with him. That was at the end of February. He was out of sorts, he said, and was going into Devonshire. I presume he went. [*Turning to* ZOE *who, with parted lips, is staring guiltily at the carpet.*] He's in London now, though. I saw him about a fortnight ago, at the Opera. I was with the Ormerods, in their box; he was in the stalls. [*Touching* ZOE'S *shoulder.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

Yes?

ETHEL.

He's so altered.

ZOE.

Altered?

ETHEL.

In his appearance. You recollect how boyish and fresh-looking he was?

ZOE.

Y-yes.

ETHEL.

All that's gone. He's become—oh, but I dare say you've seen him since you've been home?

ZOE.

J-just for a minute or two.

ETHEL.

You must have noticed ——?

ZOE.

N-now you mention it ——

ETHEL.

I watched him through the opera-glass several times during the evening. [*Simply.*] He looks like a lost soul.

ZOE.

I—I've never—ha, ha!—I've never made the acquaintance of a lost—ha, ha!——

ETHEL.

[*After a pause.*] Zoe, do you think anything has happened to Lenny Ferris?

ZOE.

H-happened?

ETHEL.

Anything bad.

ZOE.

Bad?

ETHEL.

Men's lives are constantly being wrecked by racing, or cards, or —— [*Half turning from* ZOE.] Oh, I oughtn't to know about such things, but one doesn't live in the dark—he may have got mixed up with some woman of the wrong sort, mayn't he?

ZOE.

[*Rising quickly and walking away to the left.*] I—I really can't discuss topics of that kind with you, Ethel.

ETHEL.

[*Wistfully.*] No; but if he *is* in any scrape—any entanglement—and one could help him ——

ZOE.

[*At the writing-table, taking up a bottle of salts—faintly.*] Help him?

ETHEL.

Save him ——!

ZOE.

[*Sniffing the salts.*] How—how romantic you are!

ETHEL.

Am I! [*Her elbows on the back of the armchair by the oblong table, timidly.*] Zoe, would it be possible—in your opinion—would it be possible for me to—to see him?

ZOE.

[*Sitting in the chair at the writing-table.*] See Mr. Ferris?

ETHEL.

[*Plucking at the cover of the chair on which she is leaning.*] Here—in your house—or elsewhere—see him and offer him my friendship—a sister's friendship? *You* could manage it.

ZOE.

My—my dear!

ETHEL.

Oh, yes, I'm lacking in dignity, aren't I—and self-respect! [*Coming forward.*] I've told myself that a thousand times. [*Warmly.*] But there are quite enough dignified people in the world without me; and if I could influence Lenny, any one might have my dignity for two-pence.

ZOE.

Influence him——?

ETHEL.

For his good. Oh, I don't want to boast, but I'm a straight, clean girl; and it may be that, at this particular moment of his life, the more he sees of women like you and me the better. However, if you tell me the idea's improper, I'll accept it from you. [*Approaching* ZOE.] I'll take anything from you. [*Appealingly.*] But don't tell me that, if you can avoid it. Give me the oppor-

tunity, if you can, of showing him that I'm different from most girls—that I'm above petty, resentful feelings. [*Bending over* ZOE.] Zoe ——

[LENA *enters at the further door on the right, carrying a silver salver on which are a dose of medicine in a medicine-glass and a dish of sweetmeats.*

LENA.

Your med'cine! [*Closing the door.*] Good-morning, Miss Pierpoint.

ETHEL.

Ah, Lena!

ZOE.

[*To* ETHEL, *rising hastily.*] Excuse me ——

[LENA *advances and* ZOE *goes to her and, with a shaking hand, drinks the medicine.*

LENA.

[*To* ZOE.] Good gracious, how queer you look! [*To* ETHEL.] She's doing too much to-day, Miss Pierpoint. [*Going to* ETHEL.] Dr. Rashleigh says she's frightfully below par.

ETHEL.

[*Picking up her sunshade.*] What a shame of me! [*Running to* ZOE.] I won't stay another minute.

ZOE.

[*Sitting on the settee on the right.*] I *am* a little fatigued.

ETHEL.

I ought to have seen it.

ZOE.

I—I'll write to you. [*They kiss.*] My love to your mother.

ETHEL.

And when you are well enough ——?

ZOE.

I'll call upon her.

ETHEL.

[*To* LENA, *who precedes her into the corridor.*] No, no; stop with Mrs. Blundell. I'm so sorry, Lena ——

[LENA *and* ETHEL *talk together for a little while in undertones; then the girl disappears.* LENA *returns.*

LENA.

[*Shutting the door.*] Silly chatterbox! [*Finding* ZOE *lying at full length upon the settee, her head buried in a pillow.*] Why do you tire yourself like this? Shall I fetch you some brandy?

ZOE.

No.

LENA.

[*Lowering her voice.*] *He's* in the house again.

ZOE.

Who?

LENA.

Mr. Ferris.

ZOE.

[*Raising herself.*] Mr. Ferris!

LENA.

[*With a jerk of her head in the direction of the next room.*] In there. [ZOE *sits upright.*] Warren's making himself beautiful and Clara answered the door. She thought you were by yourself and let him come up. [ZOE *gets to her feet.*] I was just bringing you your medicine and met him. [ZOE *goes to the writing-table, takes up the hand-mirror, and puts her hair in order.*] Lucky I'd heard that Miss Pierpoint was here; he didn't want to see her! Another second ——!

ZOE.

That'll do. [*Calmly.*] Take care I'm not interrupted again.

LENA.

Ah, now! Mayn't I get rid of him?

ZOE.

No. [*Turning.*] Run away, please.

LENA.

Oh, very good. [*Picking up the salver which she has placed upon a piece of furniture near the glazed door.*] You'll do exactly as you choose. [*In the corridor.*] I declare I'd rather look after a pack of unruly children any day in the week ——

[*She closes the door.* ZOE *glances over her shoulder, to assure herself that the woman has left the room, and then, with a fierce light in her eyes, goes to the nearer door on the right and throws it open.*

ZOE.

[*In a hard voice, speaking into the adjoining room.*] I'm alone.

[*She moves from the door as* LEONARD, *still carrying his hat and cane, enters.*

LEONARD.

By George, that was a narrow squeak! [*Closing the door.*] Whatever possessed you to be at home to the Pierpoint girl this morning?

ZOE.

[*Coldly.*] I didn't expect you back before lunch.

LEONARD.

[*Putting his hat and cane on the chair at the nearer end of the settee on the right.*] I was talking to a man at Victoria Gate and I saw Peter driving away in a Taxi. [*Facing her.*] I got sick of the Park. [*Seeing that something is amiss.*] Hallo! [*A pause.*] Any one been running me down?

[*She advances to him and, drawing herself to her full height, regards him scornfully.*

ZOE.

[*Making a motion with her hands as if she would strike him.*] You—you ——! [*Dropping her hands to her side.*] Oh, cruel—cruel—[*walking away from him*] cruel!

LEONARD.

What's cruel? Who's cruel?

ZOE.

[*At the further end of the room, on the right.*] Ah—ah ——!

LEONARD.

[*Moving to the left.*] Oh, come! Let's have it out; let's have it out.

ZOE.

Sssh! Don't raise your voice here.

LEONARD.

Somebody's been talking against me. Ethel Pierpoint?

ZOE.

[*Coming to the oblong table.*] You've behaved abominably to this girl.

LEONARD.

Ho, it *is* Miss Pierpoint!

ZOE.

No, she hasn't spoken a word against you. But she's opened her heart to me.

LEONARD.

[*Going to* ZOE.] You've known all about me and Ethel.

ZOE.

It's a lie. How much have I known? I knew that you were sizing her up, as you expressed it; but I never surmised that you'd as good as proposed marriage to her.

LEONARD.

I told you months ago—admitted it—that I'd made myself a bit of an idiot over Ethel. I fancied you tumbled to the state o' things.

ZOE.

Did you! Why, do you think—maniac as I was when you came through to me to Florence!—do you think I'd have allowed you to remain near me for five minutes if I'd known as much as I do now!

LEONARD.

Look here, Zoe ——

ZOE.

Oh, you're a cruel fellow! You've been cruel to her and cruel to me. I believe you're capable of being cruel to any woman who comes your way. Still, *she's* the fortunate one. Her scratches'll heal; but I [*sitting at the oblong table and hitting it with her fist*] I loathe myself more than ever—more than ever!

LEONARD.

[*After a pause.*] Zoe, I wish you'd try to be a little fair to me.

ZOE.

[*Ironically.*] Fair!

LEONARD.

Perhaps I did go rather further with Ethel Pierpoint than I led you to understand.

ZOE.

Oh——!

LEONARD.

I own up. Yes, but what prospect was there, when I was thick with her, of your being free of Blundell? None. And what was I to you? Merely a pal of yours—one of your "tame robins"—one of a dozen; and I'd come to a loose end in my life. It was simply the fact that there *was* no prospect for me with you that drove me to consider whether I hadn't better settle down to a humdrum with a decent girl of the Ethel breed. Otherwise, do you imagine I'd have crossed the street to speak to another woman? [*Leaving* ZOE.] Oh, you might do me common justice! [*Hotly.*] If circumstances *have* made a cad of me, am I *all* black? Can't you find *any* good in me? [*Turning to her.*] What did I tell you at Perugia?

ZOE.

[*Rising.*] Ah, don't——!

LEONARD.

That I'd been in love with you from the day I first met you—from the very moment Mrs. Hope-Cornish introduced me to you at Sandown! Well! Isn't there anything to my credit on that score? Didn't I keep my secret? For four years I kept it; though, with matters as they often were between you and Blundell, many a man might have thought you ripe grapes. [*Walking across to the right.*] Only once I was off my guard with you—when I laid hold of you and begged you, whatever happened, never to—never to——

ZOE.

[*Leaning against the table, her back to him.*] Ha, ha, ha!

LEONARD.

Yes, and I meant it; as God hears me, I meant it. If anybody had told me that afternoon that it was I who—oh, hang! [*Sitting upon the settee.*] But what I want to impress upon you is that, if I were quite the low scoundrel you make me out to be, I shouldn't have gone through what I *have* gone through these past four years and more. Great Scot, it's been nothing but hell—hot hell—all the time! Four whole years of pretending I was just an ordinary friend of yours—hell! Four years of reasoning with myself—preaching to myself—hell! That awful month after Blundell left you—when you'd gone to Italy and I was in London—worse than hell! My chase after you—our little tour together—my struggle even then to play the correct game—and I *did* struggle—hell! And since then—hell! [*His elbows on his knees, digging his knuckles into his forehead.*] Hell all the time! Hell all the time!

[There is a silence, and then, with a look of settled determination, she comes to him slowly and lays her hands upon his head.

ZOE.

Poor boy! I'm sorry I blackguarded you. [*Sitting in the chair opposite to him and speaking in a steady, level voice.*] Len ——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

Let's part.

LEONARD.

[*Raising his head.*] Part?

ZOE.

Say good-bye to each other. [*Meeting his eyes.*] Go back to that girl.

LEONARD.

To Ethel!

ZOE.

Take up with her again.

LEONARD.

Oh, stop it, Zo.

ZOE.

She's devoted to you; and she's sound right through, if ever a girl was. She's one of the best, Len.

LEONARD.

Suppose she *is* ——

ZOE.

Be careful that she doesn't guess I've given her away. [*He rises impatiently. She rises with him and holds him by the lapels of his jacket.*] Tell her—she's sure to ask you—tell her that you haven't seen me since last Monday, nor had a line from me. Fake up some tale to account for your breaking off with her—you were in doubt whether you'd coin enough to marry on ——

LEONARD.

[*Who has become thoughtful.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

Yes?

LEONARD.

[*Looking her full in the face.*] Are you giving me the boot?

ZOE.

[*Releasing him and returning his gaze firmly.*] Yes; I am.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause.*] Oh? [*Another pause.*] What's your motive?

ZOE.

Motive?

LEONARD.

What's behind all this?

ZOE.

[*Simply.*] I want you to be happy, Len—really and truly happy. I believe you'd stand a jolly good chance of being so with Ethel Pierpoint; never with me.

LEONARD.

And *you?*

ZOE.

I?

LEONARD.

What's to become of *you?* What are your plans for yourself?

ZOE.

[*Avoiding his eyes.*] Oh, don't you—don't you worry about me.

LEONARD.

Rot!

ZOE.

[*Nervously.*] Perhaps some day—when Theodore's tired of Mrs. Annerly—ha, ha!—stranger things have happened ——

LEONARD.

Rot, I say. [*She retreats a little.*] Do you think you can drum me out like this! [*Following her.*] Have you got some other ——? [*He checks himself.*

ZOE.

[*Confronting him.*] Some other ——?

LEONARD.

Oh, never mind.

ZOE.

Out with it!

LEONARD.

Some other fancy-man in tow?

ZOE.

Ah! You brute! [*Hitting him in the chest.*] You brute! [*Throwing herself into the armchair near the glazed door.*] You coward! You coward!

[*There is a pause and then he slouches up to her.*

LEONARD.

I—I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. [*He sits beside her, upon the fauteuil-stool.*] Knock my damned head off. Go on. Knock my damned head off.

ZOE.

[*Panting.*] Well—we won't part—on top of a row. [*Dashing a tear away.*] After all, why *should* you think better of me than that?

LEONARD.

[*Penitently.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

Sssh! Listen. Putting Ethel Pierpoint out of the question, do you ever picture to yourself what our married life would be?

LEONARD.

What it 'ud be?

ZOE.

The marriage of a woman of seven—nearly eight—and-thirty to a man of thirty-two! *I* do. I walk my bedroom half the night and act it all over to myself. And you've had the best of me, too; I'm not even a novelty to you. Why, of course you've realized what you've let yourself in for.

LEONARD.

I take my oath ——

ZOE.

Sssh! When you're in front of your glass in the morning, what do you see there?

LEONARD.

See?

ZOE.

This girl has noticed the alteration in your looks. She took stock of you at the opera the other night.

LEONARD.

[*Passing his hands over his face consciously.*] Men can't go to hell, Zo, without getting a bit scorched.

ZOE.

[*Imitating his action.*] No, nor women either. [*Turning to him.*] But it's only quite lately that you've lost your bloom, Len.

LEONARD.

Oh, naturally I've been horribly bothered about you—about both of us—since ——

ZOE.

Since your trip to Italy? [*He nods.*] Yes, and naturally you've told yourself, over and over again, the truth —since your trip to Italy.

LEONARD.

Truth?

ZOE.

The simple truth—that you've got into a mess with a married woman ——

LEONARD.

I—I ——

ZOE.

And that you must go through with it, at all costs.

LEONARD.

I swear to you, Zoe ——

ZOE.

[*Touching his hand.*] Oh, my dear boy, you haven't perhaps *said* these things to yourself, in so many words, but they're at the back of your brain just the same.

[*She rises and crosses to the fireplace and rings three times.*

LEONARD.

[*Rising.*] What—what are you doing?

ZOE.

Ringing for Lena, to tell her I'm not lunching downstairs.

LEONARD.

By God, Zoe ——!

ZOE.

[*Imperiously.*] Be quiet!

LEONARD.

[*Shaking his fist at her.*] You dare treat me in this way! You dare!

ZOE.

[*Advancing.*] Ah, I'm only hurting your pride a little; I'm only mortifying your vanity. You'll get over that in twenty-four hours.

LEONARD.

Do you know what you *are*; do you know what you make yourself by this!

ZOE.

Yes, what you made of me at Perugia, and at Siena, and at ——! [*Suddenly, clinging to him.*] Lenny—Lenny —kiss me ——!

LEONARD.

[*Pushing her from him.*] Not I.

ZOE.

Ah, yes. Don't let's part enemies. It's good-bye. Lenny!

LEONARD.

No.

ZOE.

[*Struggling with him entreatingly.*] Quick! It's for the last time. You'll never be alone with me again. [*Her arms tightly round him.*] It's for the last time. [*Kissing him passionately.*] Good luck to you! Good luck to you! Good luck to you!

[*She leaves him and sits at the writing-table where she makes a pretence of busying herself with her papers.*

LEONARD.

[*Glancing expectantly at the glazed door—between his teeth.*] You—you ——!

[*Presently he goes to the chair on the right and snatches up his hat and cane.* LENA *enters at the glazed door.*

LENA.

[*To* ZOE.] Is it me you've rung for?

ZOE.

Yes. [*Sharply.*] Wait.

[*There is a pause. Struck by* ZOE'S *tone, and the attitude of the pair,* LENA *looks inquisitively at* LEONARD *and* ZOE *out of the corners of her eyes, as if she guesses there has been a quarrel.* LEONARD *moves toward the door.*

LEONARD.

[*To* ZOE.] Good-morning.

ZOE.

Good-morning.

LEONARD.

[*To* LENA, *as he passes her.*] Good-morning.

LENA.

Good-morning.

[*He departs and* LENA *quietly closes the door.*

ZOE.

[*Rising.*] Lena ——

LENA.

Yes?

ZOE.

[*Walking across to the settee on the right.*] I'm not coming down to the dining-room. [*Sitting, feebly.*] Let me have a snack up-stairs.

LENA.

Very well.

ZOE.

That's all.

[LENA *withdraws, almost on tiptoe, and* ZOE *instantly produces her handkerchief and cries into it softly. Then she gets to her feet and searches*

for the cigarette box. Still shaken by little sobs, she puts a cigarette between her lips and, as she does so, the expression of her face changes and her body stiffens.

ZOE.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh ——! [*After a moment's irresolution, she hurriedly dries her eyes and, going to the glazed door, opens it, and calls.*] Lena—Lena ——!

LENA.

[*In the distance.*] Yes?

[ZOE *returns to the oblong table and is lighting her cigarette when* LENA *reappears.*

ZOE.

Lena ——

LENA.

Well?

ZOE.

I'll dress directly after lunch.

LENA.

[*Coming to her, surprised.*] Dress?

ZOE.

Yes; I'm going out this afternoon.

LENA.

Going out! Why, you must be crazy ——!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is a fine, spacious room, richly furnished and decorated. In the centre of the wall at the back is the fireplace, and on the left of the fireplace is a door which when open reveals part of a dining-room. In the right-hand wall there is a bay-window hung with lace and other curtains. Facing the window, in the wall on the left, is a double-door opening into the room from a corridor.

On either side of the fireplace there is an armchair, and between the fireplace and the dining-room door stands a small table on which are a decanter of whiskey, a syphon of soda-water, and two or three tumblers. A grand piano and a music-stool are in the right-hand corner of the room, and on the left of the piano is a settee. Some photographs are on the top of the piano. On the other side of the room there is a second settee with a table at the nearer end of it. An armchair stands by this table, another at the further end of the settee. In the bay-window there is a writing-table with a writing-chair before it, and on the writing-table is a telephone-instrument. Other articles of furniture, some pieces of sculpture, and some handsome lamps on pedestals, fill spaces not provided for in this description.

A scarf of mousseline de soie and a pair of white gloves lie on the chair on the right of the fireplace.

The fireless grate is hidden by a screen and, through the lace curtains, which are drawn over the window, a fierce sunlight is seen.

The door at the back is slightly ajar.

[*The telephone bell rings and presently* THEODORE BLUNDELL *enters at the door at the back, and goes to the writing-table. His step has become heavier, his shoulders are somewhat bent, and he looks a "bad color."*

THEODORE.

[*At the telephone.*] Halloo! . . . Yes? . . . I *am* Mr. Blundell. . . . Oh, is that you, Peter? . . . What? . . . Want to see me? . . . Anything wrong? . . . Where are you? . . . Where? . . . Café Royal? . . . Come along to me now, then? . . . Oh, I say! . . . Are you there? . . . [*Dropping his voice.*] I say! Mrs. A. is lunching with me. . . . Mrs. A.—Alice. . . . No, but I thought I'd tell you. . . . Good-bye.

[*He is about to return to the dining-room when* MRS. ANNERLY *appears in the doorway at the back. She is a pretty, charmingly-dressed creature with classical, immobile features and a simple, virginal air.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Advancing.*] I've told Cole we'll have coffee in this room. [*He nods and sits moodily upon the settee on the right. Resting her elbows on the back of the armchair at the further end of the settee on the left, she surveys her face in a tiny mirror which she carries, with some other trinkets, attached to a chain.*] Who's that you were talking to on the 'phone, boy dear?

THEODORE.

[*Who is smoking a big cigar.*] Mottram.

MRS. ANNERLY.

What's *he* want?

THEODORE.

Wants to see me about something.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Business?

THEODORE.

Dun'no.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sweetly.*] He doesn't like poor little me.

THEODORE.

[*Indifferently.*] Doesn't he?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You know he doesn't. [*Arranging a curl.*] That's why you gave him the tip that I'm lunching here.

THEODORE.

Ho! Listeners—*et cætera.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

I couldn't help hearing you; positively I couldn't. [*Examining her teeth in the mirror.*] He's one of your wife's tame cats, isn't he?

THEODORE.

He's a friend of hers—yes.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Just a friend, and nothing else.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Now, look here, Alice ——!

[COLE, *a man servant, enters from the dining-room with the coffee and liqueurs.* MRS. ANNERLY *takes a cup of coffee.*

COLE.

[*To* MRS. ANNERLY.] Brandy—Kümmel, ma'am?

MRS. ANNERLY.

No, thanks.

THEODORE.

[*To* COLE, *who comes to him with the tray—irritably.*] Leave it. [COLE *places the tray on the top of the piano and is returning to the dining-room.*] Cole ——

COLE.

Yessir?

THEODORE.

I'm expecting Mr. Mottram.

COLE.

Very good, sir.

[*The man withdraws, closing the door.* THEODORE *rises and pours some brandy into a large liqueur-glass.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Who has seated herself upon the settee on the left.*] What's the matter with you to-day, boy dear? You're as cross as two sticks.

THEODORE.

Liver.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sipping her coffee.*] I don't wonder.

THEODORE.

Why?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You're getting rather too fond of—[*pointing to the brandy*] h'm, h'm.

THEODORE.

[*Bluntly.*] It's false.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*With undisturbed complacency.*] I've seen so much of that sort o' thing in my time. [*He makes a movement, as if to put down his glass without drinking.*] Still, I must say you've every excuse.

THEODORE.

Alice ——

MRS. ANNERLY.

What?

[*He gulps his brandy, puts the empty glass on the tray, and comes to her.*

THEODORE.

[*Standing before her.*] Alice, will you oblige me by refraining from making any allusion to my wife, direct or indirect, in the future? It annoys me.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Everything annoys you this afternoon.

THEODORE.

You were at it last night, at the Carlton. And to-day, during lunch ——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*In an injured tone.*] It was you who told me that that little Jew chap had met her careering about Italy with young what's-his-name. [*He sits in the armchair at the*

further end of the settee and leans his head on his hand.] Ah, but that was in your loving days—when you used to confide in me.

THEODORE.

I was in a rage and said a great deal more than I thought.

MRS. ANNERLY.

If you did, you needn't jump on me for trying to feel interested in you and your affairs.

THEODORE.

[*Facing her.*] At any rate, understand me clearly, Alice—and then drop the subject. [*Shortly.*] Mrs. Blundell and I are separated; she's gone one way, I another. There were faults on both sides, as usual, but I was mainly to blame. There's the thing in a nutshell.

MRS. ANNERLY.

This isn't in the least your old story.

THEODORE.

Never mind my old story. [*Extending a forefinger.*] *You* forget the old story, my girl, if you wish our acquaintance to continue—d'ye hear?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Shaking herself.*] You're a nasty savage.

THEODORE.

As for that interfering cad Lowenstein, it unfortunately happens that one of Mrs. Blundell's characteristics is a habit of disregarding *les convenances*—a habit which I didn't go the right way to check. It's probable that, before she's done, she won't leave herself with as much reputation as 'ud cover a sixpence. She's impulsive,

reckless, a fool—but she's no worse. [*Eying the stump of his cigar fiercely.*] My wife's no worse. So, hands off, if you please, in my presence. Whatever reports are circulated to her discredit, the man who speaks against her in my hearing is kicked for his pains; and the woman who does so, if she's under my roof, gets taken by the shoulders and shown the mat. [*Looking at her.*] *Comprenez?*

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Pouting.*] I should be a juggins if I didn't. *Parfaitement*—in my very best French.

THEODORE.

[*Rising and walking about.*] That's settled, then.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*After a pause, rising and depositing her cup upon the table on the left—thoughtfully.*] Boy dear ——

THEODORE.

[*At the back.*] Hey?

MRS. ANNERLY.

It was regular cat-and-dog between you two at the end, wasn't it?

THEODORE.

[*Breaking out again.*] It's no concern of yours whether it was or was not. I've asked you ——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Crossing to the right, with a shrug.*] Oh ——!

THEODORE.

Yes, it *was*. [*Half-sitting upon the back of the settee on the left.*] I—I tired of her.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Philosophically.*] Ah, men *do* tire.

THEODORE.

And she of me. We'd been married close upon fourteen years.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Oh, well, come; that's a long while.

THEODORE.

[*As much to himself as to her.*] Our wedding-day's on the thirtieth of this month. [*Hitting the back of the settee softly with his fist.*] We'd reached a time in our lives when—when we were in mid-Channel——

MRS. ANNERLY.

Mid-Channel?

THEODORE.

[*Rising.*] Oh, you don't know anything about that.

[*There is a further silence. She sits upon the settee on the right, watching him as he moves about the room again.*

MRS. ANNERLY.

Here! [*Beckoning him with a motion of her head.*] Here! [*He goes to her. She looks up into his face.*] Why don't you marry *me*, Theo?

THEODORE.

[*Staring at her.*] Marry—you?

MRS. ANNERLY.

You'd find me awfully easy to get on with.

THEODORE.

[*Turning from her, quietly.*] Oh——!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Wait; you might listen, anyhow. [*He turns to her.*] I *am*—awfully easy to get on with. And I'd be as strict as—as strict as a nun. Honest injun! I treated Annerly pretty badly, but that's ancient history. I was only seventeen when I married Frank—too inexperienced for words. I've learnt a lot since.

THEODORE.

[*Bitterly.*] Ha!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Now, don't be satirical. [*Inviting him to sit by her side.*] Theo —— [*He sits beside her.*] I say—bar chaff—I wish you *would*.

THEODORE.

[*Absently.*] What?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Marry me. Really I do. [*A note of wistfulness in her voice.*] I really do want to re-establish myself. My life, these past few years, has been frightfully unsatisfactory.

THEODORE.

[*Touching her dress, sympathetically.*] Ah!

MRS. ANNERLY.

And I'm a lady, remember—giddy as I may have been. Put me in any society and I'm presentable, as far as manners go. I'd soon right myself, with your assistance. [*Slipping her arm through his.*] I suppose, under the circumstances, you couldn't divorce *her*, could you?

THEODORE.

What d'ye mean?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Your wife—over that Italian business.

THEODORE.

[*Jumping up.*] Damn!

MRS. ANNERLY.

Oh, I beg your pardon; it slipped out. [*He walks away to the table at the back and begins to mix himself a whiskey-and-soda.*] I'm dreadfully grieved; gospel, I am. [*Rising.*] Don't—don't, boy dear. Do leave that stuff alone. [*He puts down the decanter and comes to the settee on the left.*] I can't do more than apologize.

THEODORE.

[*Sitting.*] Tsch! Hold your tongue.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sitting beside him.*] No, but you could let *her* go for *you*, though; *that* could be fixed up. I'd even consent to be dragged into the case myself, if it would help matters forward; and goodness knows I've no ambition to appear in the Divorce Court again—I hate the hole. [*Coaxingly.*] You *will* consider it, won't you?

THEODORE.

Consider *what?*

MRS. ANNERLY.

Marrying me. Just say you'll consider it and I won't tease you any more to-day. You do owe me something, you know.

THEODORE.

Owe you ——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Well, you *have* compromised me by being seen about with me at different places lately; now, haven't you? [THEODORE *throws his head back and laughs boisterously.*] There's nothing to laugh at. Perhaps I haven't a shred of character left, in your estimation!

THEODORE.

Ho, ho!

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Rising, piqued.*] I presume you think I'm a person who'll accept a dinner at a restaurant from any man who holds up a finger to me!

THEODORE.

Why, my dear girl, you were always bothering me to take you to the cook-shops.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Bothering! [*Going to the chair on the right of the fireplace and gathering up her scarf.*] Oh, you're too rude!

THEODORE.

I was perfectly content with our quiet little meals here or in Egerton Crescent.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Yes, and to bore me to tears!

THEODORE.

Bore ——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Winding her scarf round her shoulders.*] Bore, bore, bore!

THEODORE.

[*Scowling.*] Oh, I—I bored you, did I?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Talking to me, as you used to, like a sentimental young fellow of five-and-twenty! Ridiculous! [*Picking up her gloves.*] I want a taxi-cab.

THEODORE.

[*Rising.*] Stop—stop——

MRS. ANNERLY.

I've had quite sufficient of you for to-day.

THEODORE.

[*With a set jaw.*] I'm glad you've brought matters to a head, Ally. I've something to propose to you.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Pulling on a glove.*] I've no desire to hear it.

THEODORE.

Something that's been on my mind for—oh, a month or more.

MRS. ANNERLY.

You can keep it to yourself. I'm not accustomed to being jeered at.

THEODORE.

[*Slowly walking over to the right.*] I'm sorry if I've hurt your feelings——

MRS. ANNERLY.

It's the first time I've ever made advances to a man, and I assure you it'll be the last.

THEODORE.

Ally ——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Moving toward the double-door.*] Cole will get me a Taxi.

THEODORE.

[*Authoritatively.*] Come here ; come here ; come here.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Halting behind the settee on the left, with a twist of her body.*] I shall not.

THEODORE.

[*Snapping his finger and thumb.*] Ally—[*she approaches him with assumed reluctance*] Ally—[*deliberately*] what'll you take?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Elevating her brows.*] Take?

THEODORE.

To put an end to this.

MRS. ANNERLY.

An end!

THEODORE.

To end your boredom—and mine ; terminate our—friendship.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Oh, you—you needn't cut up as rough as all this.

THEODORE.

Ah, no, no, no; I'm not angry. I'm in earnest, though. Come! What'll satisfy you? [*She curls her lip fretfully.*] A man of my years deserves to pay heavily at this game. What'll make you easy and comfortable for a bit? I'll be liberal with you, my dear, and—[*offering his hand*] shake hands—[*she turns her shoulder to him*] shake hands—[*she gives him her hand sulkily*] and I—I'll ask you to forgive me ——

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] Oh, for goodness' sake, don't let's have any more of *that.* [*Contemptuously.*] You elderlies always wind up in the same way.

[*He seats himself at the writing-table and, unlocking a drawer, produces his check-book.*

THEODORE.

Would a couple of thousand be of any service to you?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Opening her eyes widely.*] A couple of ——!

THEODORE.

[*Preparing to write.*] I mean it.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Breathlessly.*] You don't! [*He writes.*] Why, of course it would. [*Melting completely.*] Oh, but it's too much; it is positively. I *couldn't.* And I've had such a lot out of you already. You *are* generous. [*Behind his chair.*] Fancy my being huffy with you just now! [*Bending over him and arresting his pen.*] Boy dear ——

THEODORE.

Hey?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*In a whisper.*] Make it—three—will you? [*He looks at her over his shoulder with a cynical smile. She retreats.*] Oh, well! One isn't young and attractive forever, you know.

[*He finishes writing the check and, having locked up his check-book methodically, rises and comes to her.*

THEODORE.

[*Giving her the check.*] There you are.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Examining it.*] You—you've split the difference! You *are* kind. I didn't expect it in the least. [*Folding the check neatly and finding a place for it in her bosom.*] I *am* ashamed of myself for hinting so broadly. Thanks, a hundred times. [*Blinking at him.*] Sha'n't I miss you!

[COLE *enters at the double-door followed by* PETER.

COLE.

Mr. Mottram.

THEODORE.

[*Greeting* PETER *at the fireplace as* COLE *retires.*] Hallo!

PETER.

Hallo! [*Bowing to* MRS. ANNERLY.] How d'ye do?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Who has moved over to the right—distantly.*] How do you do?

THEODORE.

[*To* MRS. ANNERLY.] By-the-bye, did you say you want a taxi-cab?

MRS. ANNERLY.

If I'm not troubling you.

[THEODORE *goes out at the double-door, closing it upon* PETER *and* MRS. ANNERLY. *There is a pause.* MRS. ANNERLY, *pulling on her second glove, looks out of the window;* PETER *whistles silently.*

PETER.

[*After a while.*] Fine afternoon.

MRS. ANNERLY.

Delightful. [*After another pause, turning to him.*] Er —h'm—how do you think he's looking?

PETER.

Blundell? Seen him looking better.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*With a sigh.*] Ah! [*In a mincing voice, approaching* PETER.] Mr. Mottram, will you excuse me for offering a suggestion?

PETER.

[*Politely.*] Fire away.

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Sweetly.*] Why don't you use your endeavors to bring Blundell and his wife together again?

PETER.

[*Staring at her.*] Eh?

MRS. ANNERLY.

It would be *such* a good thing, wouldn't it?

PETER.

I agree with you; it would indeed.

MRS. ANNERLY.

I've done all *I* can to persuade him. [PETER'S *eyes open wider and wider. She busies herself daintily with her glove.*] And now, as he and I are breaking off with one another ——

PETER.

[*Quickly.*] I beg pardon?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Perhaps *you'll* take on the job—see what *you* can do.

PETER.

Breaking off ——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

[*Loftily.*] Yes; I can't stand the annoyance any longer.

PETER.

Annoyance?

MRS. ANNERLY.

People are so spiteful. It's shocking—the ill-natured construction they put upon the most harmless little friendly acts! I admit I'm rather a careless woman—haven't I suffered from it! ——

PETER.

[*Delicately.*] Then, do I happen—may I ask—to be assistin' at the grand *finale* ——?

MRS. ANNERLY.

Certainly—[*with sudden mistrust.*] Don't you try to pull my leg, Mr. Mottram, please.

[*She draws her skirt aside and passes him haugh-*

tily as THEODORE *returns. Then she goes out, followed by* THEODORE, *who closes the door; whereupon* PETER *skips to the piano, seats himself at it, and strikes up a lively air. Presently* THEODORE *reappears, shuts the door again and resumes mixing his whiskey-and-soda.*

THEODORE.

Ouf! [PETER *takes his hands from the keyboard.*] That's over.

PETER.

[*Innocently.*] Over?

THEODORE.

You've seen the last of that lady, as far as I'm concerned. [*He comes forward, carrying his tumbler, as* PETER *rises.*] What d'ye think? [*Grinning.*] She's been at me to marry her.

PETER.

[*Startled.*] Not really!

THEODORE.

To get rid of—present ties, and marry her.

PETER.

When—when did she ——?

THEODORE.

Just now—five minutes ago. [*Struck by an odd expression in* PETER'S *face.*] Why, has she been saying anything ——?

PETER.

[*Soberly.*] No, no; not a word.

THEODORE.

Poor little devil! [*He sits upon the settee on the left and drinks.*] Poor—silly—little devil!

PETER.

[*Coming to him.*] And so you took the opportunity of —er——? [THEODORE *nods.*] Just so.

THEODORE.

Ha! I expect I shall hear from her from time to time.

PETER.

Till the end o' your life. [*Another nod from* THEODORE.] Or hers. And the nearer the end the oftener you'll hear.

THEODORE.

Well, she shall have a trifle whenever she wants it. [*Looking at* PETER.] That's the least we can do, ol' man.

PETER.

Decidedly. That's the least we can do.

THEODORE.

[*Emptying his tumbler and jumping up.*] Ugh! [*Placing the glass upon the table at the end of the settee.*] I'll burn some pastilles here later on. [*Confronting* PETER.] Yes, you can have your crow; you're entitled to it.

PETER.

Crow?

THEODORE.

Your crow over me. Everything's turned out as you predicted.

PETER.

[*Demurely.*] Did *I*——?

THEODORE.

You know you did. "It's when the sun's working round to the west"—I often recall your damned words ——

PETER.

Ah, that day ——

THEODORE.

The day I left Lancaster Gate. "It's when men are where we are now"—you remember?—"it's when men are where we are now that they're most liable to fall into mischief." [*Walking away.*] God! the idiot I've made of myself!

[*He goes to the fireplace and leans upon the mantelpiece.*

PETER.

[*Quietly.*] Theo ——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

[*Moving to the settee on the left.*] Talkin' of Lancaster Gate—I've got a bit o' noos for you. [*Sitting upon the settee.*] She's home. [*There is no response from* THEODORE.] Zoe I'm speakin' of. She's home.

THEODORE.

[*Leaving the fireplace.*] Thank'ee; I know.

PETER.

You know?

THEODORE.

I was there on Monday.

PETER.

[*Surprised.*] There?

THEODORE.

Passing the house.

PETER.

Signs o' life in the winders?

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm. [*Coming forward.*] You've seen her?

PETER.

This mornin'.

THEODORE.

[*Simply.*] *I* was there again this morning.

PETER.

Passin' the house?

THEODORE.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

PETER.

You seem to take a great deal of exercise in that locality.

THEODORE.

[*Forcing a laugh.*] Ha, ha! [*Drearily.*] Well, one had good times there as well as bad; and when one views it all from a distance ——

PETER.

The good times stand out?

[*Without replying,* THEODORE *turns from* PETER *and sits upon the settee on the right.*

THEODORE.

[*After a pause.*] How—how did you find her?

PETER.

She ain't up to much.

THEODORE.

What's——?

PETER.

Chill.

THEODORE.

Doctor? [PETER *nods.*] Rashleigh?

PETER.

That's the feller. Oh, it's nothin' serious.

THEODORE.

Chill? Ha! I'll be bound she caught it through doing something foolish. [*Fidgeting with his hands.*] She has nobody to look after her—nobody to look after her.

PETER.

Her maid——

THEODORE.

Lena? Is Lena still with her? [*A nod from* PETER.] I'm glad Lena's still with her. Lena's fond of her. [*Starting up and pacing the room.*] Not that Lena can control her; a maid hasn't any authority. [*Stopping before* PETER.] She isn't *very* poorly?

PETER.

No, no. A little pulled down; that's all. And as charmin' as ever. [THEODORE *walks away and, with his hands in his pockets, gazes out of the window.*] She ain't sleepin'; that's the real bother.

THEODORE.

Not sleeping?

PETER.

Walks her room half the night and consooms too many cigarettes.

THEODORE.

Why?

PETER.

I can only give you my impression ——

THEODORE.

[*Impatiently.*] Well?

PETER.

My dear chap, d'ye think that *she* don't recollect the happy times as well as the bad 'uns? Ain't *she* viewin' it all from a distance, as you are; [*rising*] and don't the good times stand out in *her* mind as they do in yours? [*Approaching* THEODORE.] Theo ——

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

I had a long confab with her this mornin'.

THEODORE.

What about?

PETER.

The possibility of a—a reconciliation.

[*There is a pause and then* THEODORE *turns to* PETER.

THEODORE.

[*In a husky voice.*] Ho! So that's what you're after, is it?

PETER.

Yes; and I'm bent on carryin' it through.

THEODORE.

You—you meddlesome old buffer!

PETER.

[*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha!

THEODORE.

How—how did she take it?

PETER.

In a way that convinced me you've only to assure her that your old feelin's for her have returned, and in spite of everythin' ——

THEODORE.

Everything! Wait till she hears of sweet Alice.

PETER.

Wait!

THEODORE.

[*Looking at* PETER.] Why, d'ye mean ——?

PETER.

Oh, yes; it's got to her.

THEODORE.

[*Dully.*] Already?

PETER.

Jim Mallandain traveled with her from Paris on Sunday.

THEODORE.

Did *he* ——?

PETER.

I suppose he thought it 'ud amuse her.

THEODORE.

The skunk!

PETER.

If it hadn't been Jim, it 'ud have been somebody else.

THEODORE.

[*Thickly.*] You're right; somebody had to be first.

PETER.

However, I did my best for yer.

THEODORE.

Denied it?

PETER.

Warmly. I defended you and the young lady with all the eloquence I could command.

THEODORE.

Zoe didn't believe you? [*A pause.*] She didn't believe you? [PETER *shrugs his shoulders.*] Of course she didn't. [*Passing* PETER *and walking about the room.*] What did she say? Hey? Oh, I can guess; you needn't tell me. What's everybody saying? Peter, I'd give half as much as I'm worth to wipe the Annerly incident off my slate. I would, on the nail. Just fancy! To reach my age—

and to be of decent repute—and then to have your name linked with a brainless, mercenary little trull like Alice Annerly! Ha, ha! Glorious fun for 'em in the city, and at the club! *You* hear it all. Confound you, can't you open your mouth! Ho! *Of course* Zoe sums it all up; she's cute enough when she chooses. [*Sitting upon the settee on the left and mopping his face and throat with his handkerchief.*] How did it end?

PETER.

End?

THEODORE.

Your chat with my missus.

PETER.

It ended in my urgin' her to consider the matter—think it over. [*Coming to him.*] I'm dinin' with her next week. [*Sitting in the chair at the further end of the settee.*] If you'll authorize me to open negotiations with her on your behalf ——

THEODORE.

I—I approach her!

PETER.

Cert'nly.

THEODORE.

[*Twisting his handkerchief into a rope.*] No—no ——

PETER.

Why not?

THEODORE.

A couple o' months back I could have done it. Even as late as a fortnight ago—before I'd given myself away

by showing myself in public with Alice—it might have been feasible. [*Between his teeth.*] But now—when I—when I've lost any remnant of claim I may have had—on her respect ——!

PETER.

[*In his judicial manner.*] My dear chap, here is a case ——

THEODORE.

Hell with you and your case! [*Jumping up and walking away to the right.*] I couldn't screw myself up to it; I—I couldn't humble myself to that extent. [*Moving about.*] Ho! How she'd grin! She's got a cruel sense o' humor, Peter—or had once. You see, I always posed to her as being a *strong*, rather cold-blooded man ——

PETER.

A favorite pose, that, of husbands.

THEODORE.

It was more than a pose—I thought I *was* a strong man. And then—to crawl back to her—all over mud ——!

[*He halts in the middle of the room and, with a shaky hand, produces his cigar case from his pocket and takes out a cigar.*

PETER.

I was about to remark, when you chipped in with your usual politeness—I was about to remark that this is a case where *two* persons have behaved more or less stoopidly.

THEODORE.

Two ——?

PETER.

You more, she less.

THEODORE.

[*His brow darkening.*] You—you're referring to ——?

PETER.

Er—Mrs. Zoe ——

THEODORE.

[*Cutting his cigar viciously.*] With—Ferris.

PETER.

Yes; and I think that the friend of both parties—the individual on whose shoulders the task of adjustin' matters would fall—[*rising*] I think that that friend might manage to impose a condition which 'ud be greatly to your advantage.

THEODORE.

Condition?

PETER.

No imputations to be made on either side.

THEODORE.

[*Broodingly.*] No—imputations ——?

PETER.

Each party acceptin' the statement of the other party, and promisin' not to rake up anythin' that's occurred durin' the past four months.

THEODORE.

I—I understand.

PETER.

It 'ud help to save your face for the moment, and the healin' hand of time might be trusted to do the rest.

THEODORE.

[*Quietly.*] Peter——

PETER.

Hallo!

THEODORE.

When I was at the house on Monday—my wife's house—half-past eleven in the morning——

PETER.

Well?

THEODORE.

There was a yellow car at the door.

PETER.

Yaller car?

THEODORE.

I couldn't get near, but—that fellow has a yellow car.

PETER.

Has he?

THEODORE.

[*Grimly.*] Why, he's driven you in it.

PETER.

[*Carelessly.*] I'd forgotten.

THEODORE.

[*Looking at* PETER.] He's still hanging on to her skirts, hey?

PETER.

He's an ill-bred, tactless cub. But he's got a nice 'ead of 'air and smells o' soap; and that's the sort women love to have danglin' about after 'em.

THEODORE.

[*With an effort.*] There—there's nothing in it, Peter, beyond that?

PETER.

[*Waving his hand disdainfully.*] Good God!

THEODORE.

Oh, I know there isn't; I know there isn't. With all her faults, I know she's as straight as a die. [*Looking at* PETER *again.*] Did you touch on the subject with her?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] I rubbed it in. I told her her conduct had been indiscreet to a degree. I thought it policy to rub it in.

THEODORE.

Did she—offer any explanation?

PETER.

[*Nodding.*] Pure thoughtlessness.

THEODORE.

And you felt that she was—speaking the truth?

PETER.

[*Testily.*] My dear Theodore ——

THEODORE.

You swear that? [*Suddenly, grasping the lapel of* PETER'S *coat.*] Damn it, man, *you* began talking about the thing ——!

[COLE *enters at the double-door carrying a note in the shape of a cocked-hat.*

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] What d'ye want?

COLE.

I beg your pardon, sir.

THEODORE.

[*Going to him.*] Hey?

[*He snatches the note from the man and, as he glances at the writing on it, his jaw drops.*

COLE.

[*In a low voice.*] An answer, sir?

THEODORE.

[*Trying to unfold the note.*] Messenger?

COLE.

The lady herself, I think, sir.

[*There is a pause, and then* THEODORE *slowly gets the note open and reads it.*

THEODORE.

[*To* COLE.] Where ——?

COLE.

In the smoking-room, sir.

THEODORE.

Er—wait.

COLE.

Yessir. [COLE *withdraws.*

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *who has wandered away.*] Peter ——

[PETER *comes to him and* THEODORE *hands him the note.* PETER'S *eyes bolt as he recognizes the handwriting.*

PETER.

[*Reading the note.*] "Will you see me?" Short—[*examining both sides of the paper and then returning the note to* THEODORE] sweet.

THEODORE.

[*Chewing his unlighted cigar.*] This is your doing.

PETER.

[*Beaming.*] I flatter myself it must be. [*Laying a hand on* THEODORE'S *shoulder.*] My dear Theo, this puts a noo aspect on the affair—clears the air.

THEODORE.

New aspect ——?

PETER.

She makes the first advances, dear kind soul as she is. [*A pause.*] Shall I—fetch her in?

THEODORE.

Hold hard, hold hard; don't be in such a devil of a hurry.

[*He leaves* PETER *and seats himself in a heap in the chair on the right of the fireplace.* PETER *moves softly to the double-door.*

PETER.

[*His hand on the door-handle—to* THEODORE.] *May* I?

[THEODORE *raises his head and nods.* PETER *goes out. As the door closes,* THEODORE *gets to his feet and flings his cigar into the grate. Then, hastily, he proceeds to put the room in order, closing the piano and beating out and rearranging the pillows on the settees. Finally, he comes upon* MRS. ANNERLY'S *empty coffee-cup, picks it up, and vanishes with it into the*

dining-room. After a little while, the double-door opens and PETER *returns. He glances round the room, looks surprised at not finding* THEODORE *and, with a motion of the head, invites* ZOE *to enter. Presently she appears, beautifully dressed. She also looks round; and, passing* PETER, *she moves tremblingly to the fireplace. He closes the door and joins her.*

PETER.

[*To* ZOE.] You're a brick to do this.

ZOE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Am I?

PETER.

You'll never regret it.

ZOE.

[*Clutching* PETER'S *arm.*] He will be—kind to me?

PETER.

As kind as you are to him.

ZOE.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Ah! [*She sits upon the settee on the right and her eyes roam about the room.*] What a ripping flat!

PETER.

[*Disparagingly.*] Oh, I dun'no.

ZOE.

[*With a wry mouth, plaintively.*] He *has* been doing himself jolly well, in all conscience.

[*The dining-room door opens and* THEODORE *appears. He shuts the door and edges toward* PETER *who leads him to* ZOE.

PETER.

My dear old pals——

[ZOE *gets to her feet and* THEODORE *awkwardly holds out his hand to her.*

THEODORE.

How are you, Zoe?

ZOE.

Fairly—thanks——

[*She hurriedly produces her handkerchief from a gold bag hanging from her wrist and moves away to the left. There she sits upon the settee, struggling to command herself.* PETER *gives* THEODORE'S *arm a friendly grip and makes for the double-door. As he passes behind the settee on which* ZOE *is seated, he stops to pat her shoulder.*

ZOE.

[*In a whisper, seizing his hand.*] Don't go, Peter; don't go.

[*He releases his hand, gives hers a reassuring squeeze, and goes to the door.*

PETER.

[*At the door, to* THEODORE.] I shall be in the City till six.

[*He departs. After a silence,* THEODORE *approaches* ZOE. *They carefully avoid meeting each other's eyes.*

THEODORE.

It—it's very good of you, Zo, to—to hunt me up.

ZOE.

I—I went first to Copthall Court. [*Wiping a tear from her cheek.*] I—I thought I should find you there.

THEODORE.

I—I haven't been at all regular at the office lately. [*A pause. They look about the room in opposite directions.*] Er—Peter tells me he had a little talk with you this morning.

ZOE.

Y-yes.

THEODORE.

About our—being reconciled.

ZOE.

Yes.

THEODORE.

W-well? [*She puts her handkerchief away and takes from her bag a torn envelope with some inclosures. She gives it to him timidly and he extracts from the envelope a letter and a key.*] The—the damned cruel letter I left behind me—that evening—with my latch-key. [*She inclines her head.*] May I—destroy it?

[*She nods assent, and he tears up the envelope and letter and crams the pieces into his trouser-pocket.*

THEODORE.

[*Looking at the key.*] The—the key ——?

ZOE.

It—it's yours again—if you like.

THEODORE.

You—you're willing ——? [*Again she inclines her head, and he puts the key into a pocket in his waistcoat and seats himself humbly in the chair at the further end of the settee.*] Thank'ee. [*After a pause.*] Zo ——

ZOE.

Yes?

THEODORE.

[*Turning to her but not lifting his eyes.*] Look here. I'm not going to—try to deceive you. I—I want you to understand exactly what you're offering to take back.

ZOE.

Exactly ——?

THEODORE.

I gather from Peter that you came over from Paris on Sunday in the company of Mr. Jim Mallandain.

ZOE.

I picked him up by chance at the Gare du Nord.

THEODORE.

And Mr. Jim whiled away the journey by—by gossiping to you about me and—a woman of the name of Annerly?

ZOE.

On the boat.

THEODORE.

Quite so. [*A pause.*] When you mentioned the matter to Peter, he produced the whitewash bucket, didn't he?

ZOE.

Slapped it on thick.

THEODORE.

[*Looking at her from under his brows.*] But you didn't ——? [*She shakes her head.*] You're right; Peter's a liar. It's a true bill. I wish it wasn't; but it is.

ZOE.

[*After a pause, steadily.*] Well?

THEODORE.

[*Looking at her again.*] Are you prepared to forgive me that too, then? [*She nods, but with compressed lips. He bows his head.*] Anyhow, I'm easier for making a clean breast of it.

ZOE.

How—how did you—come to ——?

THEODORE.

Lower myself with this hussy? [*Looking up.*] Isn't it all of a piece? Isn't it the natural finish of the mistakes of the last year or so—the errors we've committed since we began kicking each other's shins? [*Quickly.*] Oh, I'm not reproaching you now for your share o' the transaction. It was my job—the husband's job—to be patient with you; to smooth you down gently, and to wait. But instead of doing that, I let my mind dwell on my own grievances; with the result that latterly the one being in the world I envied was the fellow who'd kept his liberty, or who'd had the pluck to knock off the shackles. [*Rising and walking about, gathering his thoughts as he proceeds.*] Well, I got my freedom at last, didn't I! And a nice mess I made of it. I started by taking a furnished lodging in St. James's Street—sky-high, quiet, *peaceful!* Ha! Hardly a fortnight was out before I had blue-devils and was groaning to myself at the very state of things I'd been longing for. Why should I be condemned, I said to myself—why should I be condemned to an infernal dull life while others round me were enjoying themselves like fighting-cocks! And just then this flat was offered to me as it stands; and in less than a month after I'd slammed the front door at Lancaster Gate I was giving a

dinner-party here—a housewarming—[*halting at the window, his back to* ZOE] a dinner-party to four-and-twenty people, and not all of 'em men.

ZOE.

[*In a low voice.*] I heard of your setting up here while I was—in Florence—[*clenching her hands*] in Florence.

THEODORE.

[*Resuming his walk.*] However, so far it was nothing but folly on my part—egregious folly. And so it continued till I—till I had the honor of being introduced to Mrs. Annerly at a supper at Jack Poncerot's. [*Eying* ZOE *askance.*] I won't give you the details of the pretty story; your imagination'll supply those—the heading o' the chapters, at any rate. Chapter One, Conceit—I had the besotted vanity to fancy she—she liked me and was genuinely sympathetic toward me; [*at the mantelpiece, looking down into the grate*] and so on to Chapter the Last—the chapter with the inevitable title—Disgust—Loathing——!

ZOE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] You—you're sure you've reached the —the final chapter?

THEODORE.

[*Turning to her.*] Heavens, yes! [*Shaking himself.*] It's all over. I've paid her off—to-day, as it happens. I've been itching to do it; and I've done it. [*Sitting upon the settee on the right.*] Another month of her society, and I believe I'd have gone to the dogs completely. [*His elbows on his knees, holding his head.*] Zo——

ZOE.

Eh?

THEODORE.

Peter says you're walking your room half the night and smoking your nerves raw.

ZOE.

Does he? He needn't have repeated ——

THEODORE.

Zo, I've been walking this horrible flat in the same way. *I* can't get to bed till I hear the rattle of the milk-carts. And *I'm* smoking too much—and—not only *that* ——

ZOE.

[*Looking at him for the first time.*] Not only *what?*

THEODORE.

Well, a man doesn't smoke till four or five o'clock in the morning on cocoa, does he?

[*There is a moment's silence, and then she rises and goes to him.*

ZOE.

Oh—Theo ——!

THEODORE.

[*Looking up at her.*] So your liberty hasn't made you over happy, either, has it, old girl?

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] No.

THEODORE.

You've been thinking, too, of the good times we've had together, hey?

ZOE.

Y-yes. [*He rises and places his hands upon her shoulders yearningly as if about to draw her to him. She shrinks from him with a startled look.*] Theo ——

THEODORE.

[*Dropping his hands.*] What?

ZOE.

[*Nervously.*] There—there's one thing I—I want to say to you—before we—before we go further——

THEODORE.

[*Feeling the rebuff.*] H'm?

ZOE.

As I've told you, I'm willing that you should return to Lancaster Gate. You may return as soon as you please; but——

THEODORE.

But?

ZOE.

It must be—simply as a companion, Theo; a friend.

THEODORE.

[*Stiffly.*] A friend?

ZOE.

[*With a slight shrug.*] Not that we've been much else to each other these last few years—except enemies. Still——

THEODORE.

[*Frowning.*] You wish to make it perfectly clear.

ZOE.

Yes.

THEODORE.

[*After a pause, icily.*] I beg your pardon. I was forgetting myself just now. Thanks for the reminder. [*Walking away from her.*] Oh, I know you can feel only the most utter contempt for me—wholesale contempt.

ZOE.

[*Entreatingly.*] Ah, no ; don't take that tone.

THEODORE.

Stand the naughty boy in the corner ; he's earned any amount of humiliation you choose to inflict.

ZOE.

You shall never be humiliated by me, Theo.

THEODORE.

[*Throwing himself upon the settee on the left.*] Evidently !

ZOE.

[*Turning away.*] Oh, for God's sake, don't let's begin fighting again ; [*sitting on the settee on the right*] don't let's do that.

THEODORE.

Ha, ha! No, no ; we won't squabble. Right you are ; I accept the terms—*any* terms. [*Lying at full length upon his back on the settee.*] As you say, we've been little more than friends of late years—good friends or bad. [*Throwing one leg over the other.*] It's your laying down the law so emphatically that riled me. Sorry I growled. [*There is silence between them. She watches him guiltily. Suddenly he changes the position of his legs.*] Zo ——

ZOE.

Yes?

THEODORE.

[*Gazing at the ceiling.*] At the same time, I'm blessed if I wouldn't rather you wanted to tear my eyes out than that you should treat me in this lofty, condescending style —scratch my face and tear my eyes out.

ZOE.

Well, I—I don't, you see.

THEODORE.

[*Smiling unpleasantly.*] Alice Annerly's an extremely handsome creature, my dear, whatever else she may be.

ZOE.

I'm—I'm sure of it.

THEODORE.

Her photo's on the top of the piano.

ZOE.

[*Restraining an impulse to glance over her shoulder.*] I—I'm not curious.

THEODORE.

Ho! You mayn't be aware of the fact, but I've paid you the compliment of resenting the deep devotion your pet poodle—Master Lenny Ferris—has been paying you recently. You might do me a similar honor. [*Meditatively.*] Master—blooming—Lenny——! [*Again there is a pause; and then, slowly, he turns upon his side so that he may face her.*] I say, that was a pretty disgraceful business—your trapesing about Italy with that fellow. [*Another pause.*] Hey?

ZOE.

[*Holding her breath.*] It *was*—unwise of me, I own.

THEODORE.

Unwise! Peter and I were discussing it when your note was brought in.

ZOE.

[*Moistening her lips.*] Were you?

THEODORE.

[*Harshly.*] Yes, we were. [*Another pause.*] My God, I think it's *I* who ought to dictate what our domestic arrangements are to be in the future—not you! [*A pause. With a motion of the head, he invites her to come to him.*] Zoe —— [*A pause.*] Don't you hear me!

[*She hesitates; then she nerves herself and rises and, with a light step, crosses the room.*

ZOE.

[*Resting her arms on the back of the chair at the further end of the settee on which he is lying.*] Still the same dear old bully, I notice.

THEODORE.

Sit down.

ZOE.

Your gentle voice is quite audible where I am.

THEODORE.

[*Putting his feet to the ground.*] You sit down a minute.

ZOE.

Puh! [*She sits haughtily.*

THEODORE.

Now, you look here, my lady; I should like an account of that Italian affair from the word go.

ZOE.

I'm not in the mood to furnish it.

THEODORE.

Perhaps not; but I'm in the mood to receive it. [*A pause.*] When did he join you?

ZOE.

He—he didn't join me; that's not the way to put it.

THEODORE.

Put it any way you like. When was it?

ZOE.

At the—end of February, I think.

THEODORE.

You think! [*A pause.*] What made him go out to you?

ZOE.

He knew I was awfully in the dumps——

THEODORE.

Did he? How did he know that?

ZOE.

He—guessed I must be.

THEODORE.

Guessed!

ZOE.

Well, I'd seen him before I went away. I *was* dreadfully depressed, Theo—dreadfully *désolée*. I never thought you'd bang out of the house as you did. I never meant, for a single moment——

THEODORE.

Where were you when he turned up?

ZOE.

I—I'd got to Florence. I'd been to Genoa and Pisa—I was drifting about——

THEODORE.

Did he dream you were in Florence?

ZOE.

Dream——?

THEODORE.

He *must* have dreamt it.

ZOE.

Oh, I see what you're driving at. He—he'd had a post-card from me——

THEODORE.

A post-card!

ZOE.

[*Feebly.*] I—I don't mean *one*—you—you silly! I—I sent him a picture from each town—so I did to Peter——

THEODORE.

Why don't you admit that you and Ferris were corresponding?

ZOE.

I—I am admitting it. It's nothing to admit.

THEODORE.

Isn't it? [*A pause.*] Well, he arrives in Florence——?

ZOE.

Don't worry me this afternoon, Theo ——

THEODORE.

How long was he with you in Florence?

ZOE.

I'm seedy; I had quite a temperature yesterday. Lena called in Rashleigh ——

THEODORE.

How long was he with you in Florence?

ZOE.

He wasn't "with" me.

THEODORE.

How long?

ZOE.

A week—eight days ——

THEODORE.

Same hotel?

ZOE.

No, no, no!

THEODORE.

And afterward ——?

ZOE.

I wanted to do a little tour of the quiet old places—Perugia—Siena ——

THEODORE.

So did *he*, hey?

ZOE.

He tacked on. I saw no harm in it at the time.

THEODORE.

At the time!

ZOE.

Nor do I now.

THEODORE.

It was coming from Perugia you fell up against Lowenstein.

ZOE.

If you were a man you'd thrash that beast.

THEODORE.

Lowenstein had the room at the hotel there—the Brufani—that Ferris had had.

ZOE.

[*Protestingly.*] Ah——!

THEODORE.

In the same corridor as yours was.

ZOE.

It was stupid—stupid—stupid of Lenny to let them carry his bag up to the Brufani. It was all done before—before it dawned on him——

THEODORE.

Where were you moving on to when Lowenstein met you at Arezzo? [*A pause.*] Hey?

ZOE.

[*Passing her hand across her brow, weakly.*] Let me off to-day, Theo; my head's going like a clock. [*Get-*

ting to her feet.] Take it up again another time. [*She goes to the settee on the right and picks up her bag which she has left there. He rises and follows her, so that when she turns they come face to face. She steadies herself.*] Well, you turn it over in your mind about coming back to me. I don't want to put pressure on you; only I—I understood from Peter you were feeling kindly toward me again.

THEODORE.

[*Quietly.*] When did you see Ferris last?

ZOE.

Oh, drop Ferris.

THEODORE.

When?

ZOE.

Oh—over two months ago—at the end of the little jaunt.

THEODORE.

Not since? [*She looks at him vacantly and shakes her head.*] That's a lie. He was with you on Monday morning at half-past eleven. D'ye deny it?

ZOE.

You—you're so jealous, one—one's afraid ——

THEODORE.

[*With sudden, fierce earnestness.*] Zoe ——

ZOE.

[*Helplessly.*] I'm not going to remain here to be ——

THEODORE.

Give me your word nothing wrong's occurred between you and Ferris. [*A pause.*] I don't ask for your oath; I'll be satisfied with your word. [*A pause.*] Give me your word.

[*She sits upon the settee, her hands lying in her lap.*

ZOE.

[*Staring at him.*] Theo—I've forgiven you; forgive *me.*

[*There is a silence and then, dumbfoundered, he moves to the chair at the further end of the settee on the left and sits there.*

THEODORE.

[*After a while.*] Florence?

ZOE.

No. Perugia—Siena—— [*Brokenly.*] It was in Florence I first lost my senses. I'd been pitying you, hating myself for the way I'd served you, and had been trying to concoct a letter to you. And then one arrived from *him,* telling me you'd taken this big flat and were having a splendid time. It made me furious; and when he came through to me, I was half beside myself. And then he planned out the little tour, and I said Yes to it. [*Wringing her hands.*] Why! Why did I fall in with it! I shall never know why—except that I was mad—blind mad——! [*Leaning back, her eyes closed.*] Get me a drop o' water.

[*He rouses himself and goes to the table on the left of the fireplace and half fills a tumbler with soda-water. Then he brings her the tumbler and holds it out to her.*

THEODORE.

Here——

ZOE.

[*Opening her eyes and looking up at him beseechingly.*] Be—merciful to me.

THEODORE.

[*Peremptorily.*] Take it.

ZOE.

[*Barely touching the glass.*] Don't—don't be hard on me, old man.

[*He thrusts the tumbler into her hand and she drinks.*

THEODORE.

[*Heavily.*] I—I must have some advice about this—some advice.

ZOE.

Advice? [*He goes to the writing-table, sits there, and places the telephone-receiver to his ear.*] You—you won't do anything to disgrace me publicly, will you, Theo? [*He taps the arm of the instrument impatiently.*] You won't do anything spiteful? [*He rings again.*] You and I are both sinners, Theo; we've both gone a mucker.

THEODORE.

[*Speaking into the telephone.*] London Wall, one, three, double five, eight.

ZOE.

That's Peter. *He* won't advise you to do anything spiteful. [*She rises painfully, puts the tumbler on the top of the piano, and walks about the room.*] What *can* you do? You can do nothing to hurt me; nor I you. We're both sinners.

THEODORE.

[*Into the telephone.*] Hallo! . . . Are you Blundell, Slade and Mottram? . . . Is that Mr. Ewart? . . . Mr. Blundell. . . . Mr. Mottram not back yet, I suppose? . . .

ZOE.

[*In a murmur.*] Both—both gone a mucker.

THEODORE.

[*Into the telephone.*] . . . When he comes in, tell him I want to see him at once. . . . Cavendish Square . . . at once. . . . [*Replacing the receiver.*] Good-bye.

ZOE.

[*On the left.*] Peter—Peter won't let you—be too rough on me.

THEODORE.

[*Leaning his head on his hands.*] Ho, ho! An eye-opener for Peter! But he's been a first-rate prophet all the same. [*In a muffled voice.*] Yes, Peter's been right all along the line, with his precious mid-Channel!

ZOE.

[*Looking at him and speaking in low, measured tones.*] Theo —— [*He makes no response.*] Theo —— [*Coming to him slowly.*] I—I was thinking it over—beating it all out—driving into the city and back again. *Our* marriage was doomed long, long before we reached mid-Channel.

THEODORE.

[*Absently, not stirring.*] Oh?

ZOE.

It was doomed nearly fourteen years ago.

THEODORE.

[*As before.*] Oh?

ZOE.

From the very beginning.

THEODORE.

[*Raising his head.*] What d'ye——?

ZOE.

It was doomed from the moment we agreed that we'd never be encumbered in our career with any—brats of children. [*He partly turns in his chair, to listen to her.*] I want you to remember that bargain, in judging me; and I want you to tell Peter of it.

THEODORE.

Yes, it suits you to rake that up now——

ZOE.

[*Pressing her fingers to her temples.*] If there had been "brats of children" at home, it would have made a different woman of me, Theo; such a different woman of me—and a different man of you. But, no; everything in the earlier years of our marriage was sacrificed to coining money—to shoving our way through the crowd—to "getting on"; everything was sacrificed to that.

THEODORE.

[*Angrily.*] Oh——!

ZOE.

And then, when we had succeeded—when we had *got* on—we had commenced to draw apart from each other; and there was the great, showy, empty house at Lancaster Gate for me to fret and pine in. [*He waves his arm scornfully.*] Oh, yes, we were happy in those climbing days

—greedily, feverishly happy; but we didn't look to the time when we should need another interest in life to bind us together—the time when we'd got on in years as well as in position. [THEODORE *starts up.*] Ah, Theo, I believe we should have crossed that Ridge safely enough [*laying her hands upon his breast*] but for our cursed, cursed selfishness——!

THEODORE.

[*Shaking himself free.*] Well, there's not the slightest use in talking about what might, or might not, have been. [*Passing her and pacing the room.*] One thing is absolutely certain—it's impossible for us ever to live under the same roof again under *any* conditions. That's out o' the question; I couldn't stoop to that.

ZOE.

[*Leaning against the chair at the writing-table.*] No, you draw the line at stooping to Mrs. Annerly.

THEODORE.

Oh, don't keep on harping on that string. The cases are as far apart as the poles.

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] Ha, ha!

THEODORE.

[*Halting in the middle of the room and drumming upon his brow with his fingers.*] Of course, we can make our separation a legal one; but that wouldn't give us release. And as long as we're tied to one another—[*abruptly, looking at her*]. Zoe——

ZOE.

[*Meekly.*] Eh?

THEODORE.

If I allowed you to divorce me—made it easy for you—would Ferris—would that scoundrel marry you?

ZOE.

[*Turning to him, blankly.*] M-marry me?

THEODORE.

Because—if it 'ud save you from going utterly to the bad ——

ZOE.

[*Advancing a step or two.*] No, no; I wouldn't—I wouldn't marry Lenny.

THEODORE.

[*After a moment's pause, sharply.*] You wouldn't?

ZOE.

No—no ——

THEODORE.

[*Coming close to her.*] Why not? [*She shrugs her shoulders confusedly.*] Why not?

[*She wavers, then grasps his arm. Again he shakes her off.*

ZOE.

[*Appealingly.*] Oh, Theo, stick to me. Don't throw me over. Wait—wait for Peter. Theo, I've never ceased to be fond of you ——

THEODORE.

Faugh!

ZOE.

Not at the bottom of my heart. No, nor you of me; there's the tragedy of it. Peter says the same. [*Seizing his hand.*] Take time; don't decide to-day ——

THEODORE.

[*Freeing his hand and looking at her piercingly.*] When did you see him last?

ZOE.

H-him?

THEODORE.

Ferris.

ZOE.

This—this morning.

THEODORE.

This morning!

ZOE.

I—I confess—this morning. I—I sent him away.

THEODORE.

Sent him—away?

ZOE.

[*Nodding.*] Yes—yes ——

THEODORE.

[*Slowly.*] And so you rush off to me—straight from the young gentleman ——

ZOE.

W-well?

THEODORE.

[*Suddenly.*] Why, damn you, you've quarreled!

ZOE.

No——

THEODORE.

He's chucked you——!

ZOE.

No——

THEODORE.

Had enough of you!

ZOE.

[*Her eyes blazing.*] That's not true!

THEODORE.

Ho, ho! You bring me his cast-off trash, do you——!

ZOE.

It's a lie!

THEODORE.

Mr. Lenny Ferris's leavings!

ZOE.

It's a lie! He'd give his soul to make me his wife.

THEODORE.

Will he tell *me* that?

ZOE.

Tell *you!*

THEODORE.

[*Between his teeth.*] If he doesn't, I'll break every bone in his carcase.

ZOE.

[*Throwing her head up defiantly.*] Of course he'd tell you.

THEODORE.

[*Walking away to the fireplace.*] He shall have a chance of doing it.

ZOE.

[*Making for the door, wildly.*] The sooner the better!

THEODORE.

[*Looking at his watch.*] If Peter were here ——

ZOE.

[*Behind the settee on the left, turning to* THEODORE.] Mind! I've your bond! If Lenny promises to marry me, you'll let me free myself from you?

THEODORE.

I've said so.

ZOE.

[*Missing her bag, which is again lying upon the settee on the left, and pointing to it.*] Please ——

[*He picks up the bag, and is about to take it to her, when he remembers that he has the latch-key in his pocket. He produces the key and drops it into the bag.*

THEODORE.

[*As he does so.*] You'll want this for your *new* husband.

ZOE.

Thank God, I've done with the old one! [*He tosses the bag to her in a fury and she catches it.*] Ha, ha! [*At the door.*] Ta, ta! [*She disappears.*

THEODORE.

[*Flourishing his hands.*] Oh ——!

[*Going to the piano, he takes the decanter of brandy and a glass from the tray and fills the glass to the brim.*

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is a pretty, irregularly-shaped room, simply but tastefully furnished. At the back, facing the spectator, are two double-windows opening to the floor. These windows give on to a balcony which appears to continue its course outside the adjoining rooms both on the right and left. Beyond the balcony there is an open space and, in the distance, a view of the upper part of the Albert Hall and of other lofty buildings. On the left is the fireplace—its grate empty, save for a few pots of flowers—and, nearer the spectator, there is a door opening from a corridor. Opposite this door is a door of like dimensions, admitting to a bedroom.

On either side of the fireplace and of the left-hand window there is an armchair; facing the fireplace there is a settee; and at the back of the settee are a small writing-table and writing-chair. A leathern tub for waste-paper stands beside the writing-table.

On the right of the room is a round table upon which tea is laid for three persons. Two chairs—one on the left, another at the further side—and a settee on the right are drawn up close to this table. Elsewhere are a book-case, a smoking-cabinet, and some odds and ends of furniture—the whole being characteristic of a room in a small flat occupied by a well-to-do, but not wealthy, young man.

Both the windows are open, and the glare of the afternoon sun is on the balcony and the opposite buildings.

[MRS. PIERPOINT, ETHEL, *and* LEONARD—*the ladies in their hats and gaily dressed—are seated at the round table.*

LEONARD.

[*In the chair on the left of the table—handing a dish of cakes to* MRS. PIERPOINT.] Do try one of these little cakes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*In the chair at the further side of the table.*] I couldn't.

LEONARD.

I bought them and carried 'em home myself.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You really must excuse me.

LEONARD.

[*Pushing the dish toward* ETHEL, *who is on the settee facing him.*] Buck up, Ethel.

ETHEL.

Good-bye to my dinner, then. [*Taking a cake and biting it as she speaks.*] May I, mother?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Cheerfully.*] Now, isn't that the modern young lady exactly! May I, mother! And the cake is half eaten before the poor mother can even nod her head.

ETHEL.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

May I go out for a walk, mother; and the front door bangs on the very words! May I do this; may I do

that! And a nice life the mother leads if she dares to say No.

ETHEL.

This sounds suspiciously like a sermon. [*To* LEONARD.] Lenny, sit up straight and be preached to. [*Pushing her cup to* MRS. PIERPOINT *who has the tea-tray before her.*] Another cup of tea, your reverence.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel! How—how irreligious! [*Pouring out tea.*] Ah, but it's true, every syllable of it. And in nothing is this spirit of—what shall I describe it as?——

ETHEL.

Go-as-you-pleasédness.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Giving* ETHEL *her tea.*] In nothing is this wilful, thoughtless spirit more plainly shown than in the way love-affairs are conducted at the present day.

ETHEL.

[*Whistling slyly.*] Phew!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] More tea, Leonard?

LEONARD.

No, thanks.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Resignedly.*] I *suppose* I must call you Leonard now?

ETHEL.

[*Into her teacup.*] What's the matter with "Lenny"?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I may be wrong, but I don't *think* that it was the fashion in my youth for a young lady suddenly to appear before her mother and to say, without a note of warning, "Mr. So-and-so is in the drawing-room and we wish to be engaged." Take the case of Ethel's papa—*there's* a case in point——

LEONARD.

I certainly intended to speak to you first, Mrs. Pierpoint.

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD.] You fibber!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel!

LEONARD.

Well, I—what I mean is——

ETHEL.

If you *had* done so, I'd never have looked at you again. Surely, if there is one thing which is a girl's own particular business, it is settling preliminaries with her best young man.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

My dear!

ETHEL.

[*Jumping up.*] Anyhow, mother, if you wanted to play the dragon, you shouldn't have been up-stairs, sleeping off the effects of an exceedingly heavy lunch, when Lenny arrived this afternoon.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Fiddle, heavy lunch! A morsel of minced chicken ——!

ETHEL.

Ha, ha! [*Bending over* MRS. PIERPOINT.] And you don't mind, do you—not actually—[*kissing* MRS. PIERPOINT] as long as ——?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

As long as what?

ETHEL.

As long as—Lenny's contented?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Shaking herself.*] Oh, go away.

[*Laughingly*, ETHEL *wanders about inspecting the various objects in the room.*

LEONARD.

[*To* MRS. PIERPOINT, *producing his cigarette-case.*] Do you object?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Not in the least. Ethel's papa used to indulge, in moderation.

LEONARD.

[*To* ETHEL, *over his shoulder.*] Cigarette, Ethel?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, I forbid it.

ETHEL.

[*Putting on her gloves.*] I would, but it makes me swimmy.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] How do *you* know?

ETHEL.

I've smoked with Zoe Blundell.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

This is news to *me.*

ETHEL.

Zoe smokes like a chimney.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] By-the-bye, she's in London again.

LEONARD.

[*Uncomfortably.*] Yes—yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel called on her this morning at Lancaster Gate.

LEONARD.

Did she?

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD.] I told you, Len.

LEONARD.

Ah, yes.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] Have *you* seen her? I presume not.

LEONARD.

Er—for a few minutes. I was in the neighborhood on —on Monday, and I noticed the blinds were up, and I— I just rang the bell to—to inquire.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Elevating her eyebrows.*] She received you?

LEONARD.

She—she happened to be in the hall.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I was going to *say*—a woman in her peculiar position ought hardly ——

LEONARD.

No, of course.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Looks ill, I understand?

ETHEL.

Frightfully.

LEONARD.

Does she?

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I am afraid—I am very much afraid—that dear Mrs. Blundell was not *entirely* free from blame in her treatment of that big, rough husband of hers.

ETHEL.

[*At the left-hand window.*] Rubbish, mother!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, you are *too* disrespectful.

ETHEL.

Sorry.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

At the same time, she is an exceedingly attractive person—a trifle vulgar, poor soul, occasionally ——

ETHEL.

[*Hotly.*] Mother!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] But good-natured people frequently *are* vulgar—aren't they?

ETHEL.

[*Going on to the balcony.*] Oh ——!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] You were quite a friend of hers before the sad split, weren't you—quite a friend?

LEONARD.

Yes, I—I always found her a very decent sort.

ETHEL.

[*Her hands upon the rail of the balustrade, calling.*] Mother, do come and look at the tiny men and women.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Men and women ——? [MRS. PIERPOINT *rises and goes to the window, whereupon* LEONARD *jumps up as if relieved by the interruption.*] You're soiling your gloves, Ethel.

ETHEL.

Look down there. What tots!

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Drawing back from the window.*] Oh, my dear, I can't ——

ETHEL.

Do, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

You know I don't care for heights.

ETHEL.

I'll steady you. [MRS. PIERPOINT *timidly ventures on to the balcony.* ETHEL *takes her arm.*] There's been a concert—or a meeting. [*Calling.*] Lenny ——

[LEONARD *has walked away to the writing-table gloomily. He is about to join the ladies on the balcony when the door on the left opens and* RIDEOUT, *his servant, appears.*

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] Eh?

[*After glancing discreetly in the direction of the ladies on the balcony,* RIDEOUT *produces a visiting-card from behind his back.* LEONARD *goes to him and takes the card, and looks at it in astonishment.*

RIDEOUT.

[*Quietly.*] There's some writing on it, sir.

LEONARD.

I see. [*In a low voice.*] Where is she?

RIDEOUT.

In my room, sir. I said you were engaged.

LEONARD.

[*Uneasily.*] You didn't tell her who's here.

RIDEOUT.

No, sir; merely some friends to tea.

LEONARD.

All right. I sha'n't be very long. [RIDEOUT *is going.*] Tss —!

RIDEOUT.

[*Stopping.*] Yessir?

LEONARD.

Keep your door shut.

RIDEOUT.

Yessir.

[RIDEOUT *withdraws.* LEONARD *crams the card into his waistcoat-pocket and is again about to join the ladies when* MRS. PIERPOINT *comes back into the room.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* LEONARD.] Thank you for showing us your charming little nest. Quite—quite delightful!

LEONARD.

[*Standing by the round table.*] Oh, for bachelor quarters——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*In the middle of the room.*] There! I declare I often wonder what there is to tempt a bachelor to marry in these days.

LEONARD.

You're not a bachelor, Mrs. Pierpoint.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

No; that's true. That's perfectly true. But I've a distinct remembrance of the rooms Ethel's papa lived in when *he* was a bachelor. [ETHEL *returns and goes to the fireplace.*] They were in Keppel Street, and vastly different from these. [*Turning to* ETHEL.] Have I ever told you that poor papa lived in Keppel Street?

ETHEL.

[*Demurely.*] Yes, mother.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] And now, my dear, as we have to dine at half-past seven—[*to* LEONARD] what time does *Louise* begin? ——

LEONARD.

Oh, if we get there at nine ——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

So kind of you to take us—and as Ethel must lie down on her bed for an hour if we want her to look her best —[*pointing to the tea-table*] may I trouble you—my fan? ——

[LEONARD *searches for* MRS. PIERPOINT'S *fan among the tea things.*

ETHEL.

[*Kneeling upon the settee on the left, her elbows on the back of it, gazing into space.*] Mother ——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Eh? [*Receiving her fan from* LEONARD.] Thank you.

ETHEL.

[*Slowly.*] Mother—this is going to be an awfully happy night.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

I'm sure I hope so, my darling. It won't be my fault if it isn't—[*tapping* LEONARD'S *shoulder with her fan*] nor Leonard's.

ETHEL.

Ah, no; I mean *the* night of one's life perhaps.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Oh, I trust we shall have many, many ——

LEONARD.

Rather!

ETHEL.

[*Raising herself and gripping the back of the settee.*] No, no; you don't understand, you gabies. In everybody's life there's one especial moment ——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Moment?

ETHEL.

Hour—day—night; when all the world seems *yours*—as if it had been made for *you*, and when you can't help pitying other people—they seem so ordinary and insignificant. Well, I believe this is to be *my* evening.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

One would imagine *I* had never given you *any* pleasure, to hear you talk.

ETHEL.

[*Rising.*] I say, mother, don't make me lie down, and lose consciousness, when I get home. [*Going to* MRS. PIERPOINT *with extended arms.*] Ah, ha! You duck ——!

[*In advancing to* MRS. PIERPOINT, ETHEL *knocks over the waste-paper tub with her skirt and its contents are scattered on the floor.*

ETHEL.

[*Going down on her knees and replacing the litter.*] Sorry.

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*To* ETHEL.] You'll crease your skirt, Ethel.

LEONARD.

[*Going to* ETHEL.] Never mind that.

ETHEL.

Oh, but if I do anything clumsy at home ——! [*Coming upon some fragments of a photograph.*] Oh ——! [*Trying to fit the pieces together.*] Zoe!

LEONARD.

Yes, I—I ——

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Who has moved to the fireplace.*] Pray get off the floor, child.

ETHEL.

[*Finding more pieces.*] Why, you've been tearing up Zoe's photos.

LEONARD.

They're old things.

ETHEL.

That they're not. *This* one isn't, at all events. [*Examining one of the scraps closely.*] "—Firenze."

MRS. PIERPOINT.

Ethel, we ***must*** be going.

LEONARD.

[*Almost roughly.*] Leave them alone, Ethel.

[*A little startled by his tone, she drops the pieces into the basket and he assists her to rise.*

MRS. PIERPOINT.

[*Opening the door on the left.*] Come along at once, I insist.

[MRS. PIERPOINT *goes out.* ETHEL *is following her mother when she turns to* LEONARD *who is behind her.*

ETHEL.

[*To* LEONARD, *with a smile.*] Sorry I contradicted you.

[*They kiss hurriedly and* ETHEL *runs after her mother.* LEONARD *follows and closes the door. After a little while, the door is reopened, and* RIDEOUT *enters with* ZOE. ZOE *is dressed as when last seen.*

RIDEOUT.

[*To* ZOE, *as she passes him.*] Mr. Ferris has gone to the lift, ma'am. He won't be a minute.

ZOE.

[*Going to the left-hand window, languidly.*] All right.

RIDEOUT.

[*At the round table, putting the tea-things together upon the tray.*] Shall I make you some tea, ma'am?

ZOE.

[*Looking out of the window, speaking in a dull voice.*] No; I've had tea, in a tea-shop. [*Turning.*] Rideout——

RIDEOUT.

Yes, ma'am?

ZOE.

I should like to tidy myself, if I may; I've been walking about.

RIDEOUT.

[*Going to the door on the right and opening it.*] Cert'nly, ma'am. [*As* ZOE *approaches.*] The hot water flows cold for a few seconds, ma'am.

ZOE.

Is there any scent?

RIDEOUT.

There's some eau-de-cologne on the dressing-table, ma'am.

[*She disappears and* RIDEOUT *closes the door and continues his preparations for removing the tea-things.* LEONARD *returns.*

RIDEOUT.

[*Answering a look of inquiry from* LEONARD.] Mrs. Blundell's tidying herself, sir.

LEONARD.

Oh, yes. [*Moving about the room, irritably.*] Won't she have some tea?

RIDEOUT.

I did ask her, sir. She's had it.

LEONARD.

[*Halting.*] Did Mrs. Blundell—say anything, Rideout?

RIDEOUT.

[*Folding the table-cloth.*] Only that she wanted to see you just for ten minutes, sir, and that she thought she'd wait. And then she wrote on her card and told me to slip it into your hand if I got the opportunity.

LEONARD.

[*Resuming his walk.*] Yes, yes.

RIDEOUT.

[*After a pause.*] What time'll you dress, sir?

LEONARD.

Quarter to seven. I have to dine at half-past.

RIDEOUT.

Which suit'll you wear, sir?

LEONARD.

[*Considering.*] Er—pink lining.

RIDEOUT.

Theatre, sir?

LEONARD.

Opera. Two pairs o' gloves. [RIDEOUT *goes toward the door on the left, carrying the tea-tray.*] Tss——!

RIDEOUT.

Yessir?

LEONARD.

There's no necessity to put out my clothes yet a while.

RIDEOUT.

[*Placing the tray upon a piece of furniture so that he can open the door.*] No, sir.

LEONARD.

I'll ring when you can come through.

RIDEOUT.

[*Opening the door.*] Yessir.

LEONARD.

And I'm not at home to anybody else.

RIDEOUT.

[*Taking up the tray.*] No, sir. [*As the man is leaving the room,* LEONARD *comes to the door to close it.*] Thank you very much, sir.

[RIDEOUT *goes out and* LEONARD *shuts the door. As he turns from the door, his eyes fall upon the waste-paper tub. He snatches it up angrily.*

LEONARD.

[*Reopening the door and calling.*] Rideout——

RIDEOUT.

[*Out of sight.*] Yessir?

[RIDEOUT *presents himself at the door without the tray.*

LEONARD.

[*Shaking up the contents of the tub and then giving it to* RIDEOUT.] Burn this waste-paper.

RIDEOUT.

Yessir.

[RIDEOUT *closes the door and* LEONARD *is again walking about the room when* ZOE, *carrying her hat, gloves, and bag, appears on the balcony outside the right-hand window. She enters and they look at one another for a moment without speaking.*

LEONARD.

Hallo, Zo!

ZOE.

Hallo, Len!

LEONARD.

This *is* a surprise.

ZOE.

[*Putting her hat, gloves, and bag upon the round table —nervously.*] Is it?

LEONARD.

I thought you'd dropped my acquaintance for good and all.

ZOE.

N—no, Len. Why should you think that?

LEONARD.

Ha! Well, I bear the marks of the point of your shoe somewhere about me.

ZOE.

Oh, you—you mustn't take me too seriously when I'm in one of my vile tempers. [*A pause.*] I—I'm not—keeping you ——?

LEONARD.

No, no.

ZOE.

[*Turning the chair on the left of the round table so that it faces the writing-table.*] May I sit down?

LEONARD.

Do.

ZOE.

I was here three-quarters of an hour ago, but the porter said you were out; so I went and got some tea. [*Sitting.*] You've been entertaining, according to Rideout.

LEONARD.

[*Turning the chair at the writing-table and sitting facing her.*] A couple o' people turned up—old friends ——

ZOE.

You *are* a gay dog. [*Suddenly, staring at the writing-table.*] Why—where—where am *I?*

LEONARD.

You?

ZOE.

You always have a photograph of me, standing on your writing-table.

LEONARD.

O—oh, it's ——

ZOE.

[*Remembering.*] And there isn't one now—[*glancing at the door on the right*] in your ——!

LEONARD.

The frames had got beastly shabby. Rideout's taken 'em to be done up.

ZOE.

[*Flutteringly.*] Honor? [*A pause.*] Honor?

LEONARD.

If—if I say so ——

ZOE.

I beg your pardon. No, you wouldn't *out* my photos because of a—because of a little tiff. would you?

LEONARD.

L—likely!

ZOE.

[*Rising and going to him.*] I'm sure you wouldn't, dear boy; I'm sure you wouldn't. [*Again there is a pause, during which she passes her hand over his shoulder caressingly.*] Len ——

LEONARD.

Eh?

ZOE.

[*Standing behind him.*] After that—stupid fall-out of ours this morning—what d'ye think I did?

LEONARD.

Did?

ZOE.

Ha, ha! I—I took it into my head to—to pay Theodore a visit.

LEONARD.

Pay him a visit!

ZOE.

It—it was one of my silly impulses—I was so upset at having offended you ——

LEONARD.

Did you see him?

ZOE.

Y—yes.

LEONARD.

And what had *he* to say for himself?

ZOE.

Oh, I—I made such a mash of it, Len.

LEONARD.

Mash ——?

ZOE.

Yes, I—I let him worm it out of me.

LEONARD.

Worm it out of you?

ZOE.

Worm it—all out ——

LEONARD.

Worm *what* out of you?

ZOE.

[*Faintly.*] P-Perugia ——

[*There is a silence, and then* LEONARD *rises with an angry look.*

ZOE.

[*Holding the lapels of his coat.*] Don't be savage with me, Len. It wasn't altogether my fault. He *had* heard of it from Claud Lowenstein. And it's of no consequence; none whatever. It's just as you said this morning—he *is* ready to make matters smooth for us.

LEONARD.

[*Blankly.*] Smooth—for us!

ZOE.

Yes, to let *me* divorce *him.* He's promised—he's promised to do so, if you'll—only ——

LEONARD.

[*His jaw dropping.*] If *I*——?

ZOE.

If you'll give him your word that you'll do the right thing by me.

LEONARD.

The right thing ——!

ZOE.

Marry me. [*A pause.*] I—I suppose he—I suppose he'll demand to see you. Or perhaps he'll make Peter Mottram a go-between.

[*Again there is a silence, and then he walks away from her. She follows him with her eyes.*

LEONARD.

[*Thickly.*] But you—you wished me good-bye this morning—finished with me.

ZOE.

[*Clenching her hands.*] I know—I know! [*Coming to him.*] But he—he insulted me, Len—stung me. He flung it in my face that you—that you'd chucked me; that I was your cast-off, your leavings. I couldn't bear it from him; and I—I told him that you were all eagerness to make me your wife. [*A pause.*] Well! And so you were—this morning!

[*He sits in the chair on the left of the round table, his elbows on his knees, holding his head.*

LEONARD.

Zoe ——

ZOE.

W-what?

LEONARD.

These people I've had to tea this afternoon—ladies—two ladies ——

ZOE.

Yes?

LEONARD.

Mrs. Pierpoint was one of them—and—and ——

ZOE.

Mrs. Pierpoint ——?

LEONARD.

[*Raising his head and looking at her.*] The other was —Ethel.

ZOE.

Eth-el ——!

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] You—you made me do it.

ZOE.

[*Dazed.*] I—I made you ——! [*Drawing a deep breath.*] Oh-h-h! [*She turns from him slowly, and seats herself in the chair at the writing-table.*] I—I'd forgotten Ethel.

LEONARD.

Yes, you persuaded me to do it. [*A pause.*] Zo, you egged me on to do it.

ZOE.

[*Quietly.*] You—you didn't lose much time, did you?

LEONARD.

I—I was furious when I left you—furious.

ZOE.

[*With an attempt at a smile.*] Why, you—you must have bolted straight off to her.

LEONARD.

I—I went to the club and had some food; and then I came back here and changed—and ——

ZOE.

Got rid of those photos!

LEONARD.

I was furious—furious.

ZOE.

And then you—you bustled off to Sloane Street! [*He rises and paces the room. After a while she pulls herself together.*] Oh, well, it—it can't be helped, old boy.

LEONARD.

[*Agitatedly.*] It *must* be helped; it *must* be helped. I must get out of it; I must get out of it. Somehow or other, I must get out of it.

ZOE.

Get out of it?

LEONARD.

The—the Pierpoints ——!

ZOE.

Oh, don't talk such utter rubbish; I'd kill myself sooner. [*He throws himself into the chair on the right of the left-hand window.*] No, I'm a rotter, Len, but I'm not as low as that. Oh, no, I'm not as low as all that. [*She rises and goes slowly to the round table and, in a listless way, pulls the pins out of her hat.*] I—I'll be toddling home now. [*Tracing a pattern on the crown of her hat with the hat-pins.*] Home ——! [*Knitting her brows.*] I shall clear out of that—big—flashy—empty ——! [*Putting on her hat.*] Ha, ha! I *have* made a mash of

it, haven't I? My father always said I was a heedless, irresponsible little puss. [*With a puzzled look, her arms hanging at her side.*] There was a lot o' good in me, too —any amount o' good ——!

[*She is drawing on a glove when she turns her head in the direction of the door on the left. At the same moment,* LEONARD, *also looking at the door, gets to his feet.*

ZOE.

[*Listening.*] What's that, dear?

[*He tiptoes to the door, opens it an inch or two, and puts his ear to the opening.*

LEONARD.

[*Carefully closing the door and turning to her.*] Blundell.

ZOE.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh ——!

LEONARD.

[*In a whisper.*] Don't worry. I've told Rideout —— [*There is a pause. They stand looking at each other in silence, waiting. Suddenly* LEONARD *returns to the door and, without opening it, listens again.*] Curse the brute, he won't go!

[*He faces her irresolutely and, in a panic, she picks up her bag and her other glove and runs out at the door on the right.* LEONARD *is in the middle of the room when the door on the left is thrown open and* THEODORE *and* PETER *enter followed by* RIDEOUT. THEODORE *and* PETER *have their hats on.*

RIDEOUT.

[*To* LEONARD.] I—I beg your pardon, sir——

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] All right.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *with a hoarse laugh.*] You give the man half a sovereign, Peter; that'll soothe his feelings.

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE, *sharply.*] Sssh, sssh! Theo ——!

[RIDEOUT *withdraws.*

THEODORE.

[*Advancing to* LEONARD.] Ho! Not at home, hey?

LEONARD.

[*Facing him.*] No, I'm not; not to *you.*

PETER.

You be quiet, Ferris.

LEONARD.

[*To* THEODORE.] What the devil do you mean by forcing your way into my place?

THEODORE.

[*Raising a walking-cane which he carries.*] You ——!

[PETER *quickly puts himself between the two men as* LEONARD *seizes the chair on the left of the round table.*

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE, *endeavoring to get the walking-cane from him.*] Give me that. [*To* LEONARD.] You keep a civil tongue in your head. [*To* THEODORE.] Give it me. [*Holding the cane.*] You know what you promised. Give it up. [THEODORE *resigns the cane to* PETER *and walks away to the fireplace where he stands with his back to the others.* PETER *lays the cane upon the writing-table and*

then turns to LEONARD.] You ought to be ashamed o' yourself. [*Lowering his voice.*] You see the man's laborin' under great excitement.

LEONARD.

[*Sullenly.*] I dare say a good many people in London are laboring under excitement. That's no reason why they should have the run of my flat.

PETER.

[*Coolly.*] Will you oblige me by sittin' down and listenin' to me for a moment?

LEONARD.

Any man who treats me courteously'll be treated courteously in return. [*Sitting in the chair on the left of the round table.*] I can do with *you*, Peter.

PETER.

Can you? Then you'll be so kind as to drop addressin' me by my Christian-name. [*Sitting in the chair at the writing-table.*] Ferris ——

LEONARD.

[*Curling his lip.*] Yes, Mister Mottram?

PETER.

Mrs. Blundell called upon her husband to-day—this afternoon, about three o'clock ——

LEONARD.

[*With an assumption of ease.*] Oh? Did she?

PETER.

And made a communication to him—a communication of a very painful, very shockin' character. [*A pause.*] I presoom you don't require me—or Blundell—to enter into particklers?

LEONARD.

[*In a low voice.*] Oh, for heaven's sake, no.

PETER.

We may take it, without goin' further, that what Mrs. Blundell has stated is absolutely the truth?

LEONARD.

Absolutely. [*A pause.* THEODORE *moves from the fireplace to the left-hand window and stands there staring at the prospect.*] One thing, though, she mayn't have stated as clearly as she might ——

PETER.

What's that?

LEONARD.

That she—that she's an injured woman—badly dealt with by her husband, and worse by your humble servant; and ——

PETER.

And ——?

LEONARD.

And that both Blundell and I dam well deserve to be hanged. [THEODORE *turns to* LEONARD *fiercely.*

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE.] Well! Have you any objection to *that?*

[THEODORE *draws himself up, as if to retort; then his body relaxes and he drops into the chair on the left of the window.*

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Now, then! Attend to me.

LEONARD.

Yes?

PETER.

Obviously it's impossible, after what's transpired, that Mr. and Mrs. Blundell should ever live together again.

LEONARD.

[*Slightly surprised.*] She didn't——?

PETER.

I believe there *was* an idea that her husband should go back to Lancaster Gate. [*With a wave of the hand.*] But we needn't discuss *that.* We'd better come at once to the object of this meetin'.

LEONARD.

Object——?

PETER.

The best method of providin' for the safety—and happiness, we hope—of the unfortunate lady who's gone and made a bit of a munge of her affairs.

LEONARD.

[*Steadily.*] Yes?

PETER.

[*Deliberately.*] Ferris, Mrs. Blundell has given her husband to understand that, if existin' obstacles were removed—if she were a free woman, in point o' fact—you'd be willin' to marry her.

LEONARD.

She's correct.

PETER.

That you're keen on it.

LEONARD.

[*With a nod.*] Keen on it.

PETER.

Good. [*Dropping his voice.*] We're all tiled here. Are you prepared to give Blundell your word of—of ——?

LEONARD.

Honor? Can't you say it? [*Hotly.*] D'ye think that because a fellow's done a scoundrelly act once in his life ——!

PETER.

That'll do—your word of honor. That bein' so, Blundell undertakes, on his part, not to oppose Mrs. Blundell's action for divorce. On the contrary —— [*Turning to* THEODORE.] Theo ——?

THEODORE.

H'm?

PETER.

Your word of honor?

THEODORE.

[*In a muffled voice.*] My—word of honor.

PETER.

[*To* THEODORE *and* LEONARD, *shortly.*] Thank'ee. And both of you empower me to—to go to Mrs. Zoe ——? [*A pause.* PETER *turns to* THEODORE.] Eh?

THEODORE.

Yes.

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] And you? [LEONARD *is silent.*] What's the matter?

LEONARD.

[*After a further pause, slowly.*] Look here. I don't want either of you two men to suspect me of—of playing double ——

PETER.

Playing double!

LEONARD.

I tell you honestly—Mrs. Blundell—Mrs. Blundell declines ——

PETER.

Declines ——?

LEONARD.

Yes; she—she refuses —— [THEODORE *rises.*

PETER.

[*Also rising—to* THEODORE.] Sssh! You keep out of it. [*To* LEONARD.] Ah, but you haven't seen Mrs. Blundell since ——?

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER, *prompting him.*] Since she left me today ——

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Since she left her husband this afternoon—[*a pause*] have you?

LEONARD.

Y-yes; I have.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER.] Where?

PETER.

[*To* LEONARD.] Where? [*There is a further silence.*

THEODORE.

[*Under his breath.*] What's this game, Peter? [*Loudly.*] What's this game?

PETER.

[*Restraining him.*] Don't you interfere. [*To* LEONARD.] Ferris,——

LEONARD.

[*Rising.*] Mottram—Mrs. Blundell called on me—about a quarter of an hour ago. We—we were talking the matter over in this room when we heard Blundell kicking up a riot in the passage. [*Glancing at the door on the right.*] She—she's here. [*There is a movement from* THEODORE.] Mottram, I depend on you ——

[PETER *looks at* THEODORE *who, in obedience to the look, goes back to the fireplace.* LEONARD *moves to the door on the right and then turns.*

LEONARD.

[*Speaking across the room to* THEODORE.] Blundell, I—I've given you my word of honor—and—and I abide by Mrs. Blundell's decision. [*To* PETER, *pointing to* THEODORE.] Mottram, I—I depend on you —— [*He opens the door and calls softly.*] Mrs. Blundell—— [*There is no response.*] Mrs. Blundell——

THEODORE.

[*Looking down into the grate.*] Call her Zoe. [*Laughing again hoarsely.*] Why the devil don't you call her Zoe?

LEONARD.

[*Calling.*] Zoe ——

[*Still obtaining no reply, he goes into the next room.* THEODORE *comes to* PETER.

THEODORE.

[*To* PETER.] Some game up, hey?

PETER.

Sssh, sssh!

THEODORE.

What is it? What trick is she up to now, hey?

[LEONARD *reappears.*

LEONARD.

[*Standing in the doorway, bewildered.*] I—I can't make it out.

PETER.

What?

LEONARD.

She—she's not there.

THEODORE.

Ha! Hooked it?

LEONARD.

[*Looking toward the balcony.*] She must have gone along the balcony without our noticing her, and through the kitchen. [*Looking at* PETER.] She must have done so.

PETER.

Why?

LEONARD.

You know there's no other door ——

[*He crosses to the door on the left. As he gets to it, it opens and* RIDEOUT *presents himself.*

RIDEOUT.

[*In an odd voice.*] Sir ——

LEONARD.

[*To* RIDEOUT.] Has anybody passed through your kitchen?

RIDEOUT.

N-no, sir.

LEONARD.

[*After a pause, sharply.*] What d'ye want?

RIDEOUT.

There—there's been an accident, sir.

LEONARD.

Accident ——?

[*At this moment* THEODORE *and* PETER *turn their heads toward the balcony as if they are listening to some sounds reaching them from a distance. Giving* LEONARD *a frightened look,* RIDEOUT *withdraws quickly.* LEONARD *turns to* THEODORE *and* PETER *in time to see them hurrying on to the balcony through the left-hand window. He follows them as far as the window and recoils before them as they come back into the room after looking over the balustrade.*

THEODORE.

[*Staggering to the door on the left.*] Oh, my God; oh, my God; oh, my God ——! [*He disappears.*

LEONARD.

[*To* PETER, *shaking a trembling hand at him.*] An accident! It's an accident! [*Coming to* PETER, *appealingly.*] An accident!

PETER.

Yes—an accident—— [*Gripping* LEONARD'S *arm.*] She told me once it would be in the *winter* time——!

[*They go out together.*

THE END

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